



(NOVEL)

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Chapter 1: The Beauty from the train

David Špacapan

The train came to a stop at the lonely station, its brakes screeching on the cold, snowy tracks. A young lady stepped out onto the platform, her wavy blond hair and bright blue eyes shining in the moonlight. The snow was falling gently, forming a snow-white carpet stretching as far as she could see. Meanwhile, Aleksander Kuznetsov sat comfortably in the warm train, reading a novel from his homeland of Russia. The calming sound of the train on the tracks carried him away to the world of the novel.

Some days later, Aleksander sat on the bench, his gaze fixed on the vivid autumn leaves dancing in the gentle breeze. His slender posture reclined against the wood, the soft glow of the festive lights lighting up his emerald eyes and neat brown hair. Lost in thought, his mind wandered to the beautiful girl he had met on the train after his excursion. The only reason for the two starting their sparkling conversation being the common tongue of Russian. He had been mesmerised by her stories about Kyrgyzstan and plans for the future. As he sat there, his best friend Kasia, a lively and outspoken girl, noticed his absentmindedness and decided to break the silence.

“What are you thinking about, Alex?” Kasia asked curiously, her shoulder-length dark hair blowing gently in the chilly breeze. Aleksander looked up, startled from his thoughts.

“Oh, Kasia, I didn’t see you there,” he said, a faint smile appearing on his lips. The two friends began to walk towards the tennis court, their footsteps crunching on the fallen leaves. Aleksander couldn’t help but share the story of the girl from the train with Kasia. He told her how they had both been on a school excursion to Germany and were on the train back to Poland when they met. Kasia listened intently, her brown eyes sparkling with interest as she asked, “So, what’s her name?”

“Well, it’s an exotic name, Azurat Kadyrova,” Aleksander replied.

“What, that’s not a real name, is it? Where is she from?” Kasia asked provocatively.

“She said she had come to Poland from Kyrgyzstan a couple of years ago,” Aleksander said, slightly offended. Kasia nodded thoughtfully as they continued to walk through the park, admiring

the vibrant colours of the autumn leaves. As they walked, she playfully teased Aleksander about his interest in the girl from the train, but he didn't seem to mind. Aleksander could always count on Kasia to bring some joy into his life with her clever remarks and steadfast support. Her quick mind and unyielding devotion made it impossible for him to imagine a world without their friendship.

As Aleksander reminisced, his thoughts went back to the train ride when he first encountered Azurat. Her luscious blonde hair that elegantly cascaded down her shoulders and those blue irises glimmering in the dim light of the coach were breathtaking. He could vividly remember how contagious her laughter was and recall feeling charmed by her glooming smile. "She's unique," he said while coming out of his daydreams as Kasia nodded.

As they continued to walk, Kasia asked. "Well, why don't you ask her out on a date? Then you can know for certain why she is so unique".

"I would love to," replied Alexander, "But I didn't ask for her phone number, her stop came before I could."

After a bit, Kasia suggested: "Why don't you try finding her on social media? You know her name and where she's from, it can't be that hard."

Aleksander's eyes lit up at the idea. "That's brilliant, Kasia! I'll try that as soon as I come home."

Chapter 2: Love blossoms

Lazar Andonov

As soon as Aleksander arrived home, his heart raced as he set to work on finding Azurat on social media. He searched for her name on all the major platforms, but to no avail. His soul felt incomplete without her, his mind consumed with thoughts of her gentle smile, and the way she would twirl her hair when she was deep in thought.

After several hours of searching, he was about to give up when he stumbled upon a small social network popular in Central Asia. As he scrolled through the pages, his heart skipped a beat when he found a profile that matched her description. Her profile picture was a beautiful landscape of Kyrgyzstan, and her bio read: 'Adventurer, dreamer, and lover of all things beautiful'. It felt like destiny had finally intervened in his favour, leading him to her.

Aleksander hesitated for a moment before sending her a friend request, his fingers trembling with excitement. He didn't want to come across as creepy or desperate, but he couldn't resist the urge to reconnect with her. To his relief, she accepted his request within minutes, and they started chatting online.

Over the upcoming days, their chats were filled with poetic musings and romantic sentiments. Aleksander found himself lost in her words, transported to a world where love was all-consuming and all-encompassing. He discovered that she was studying international relations at a local university and had a passion for travelling and exploring new cultures. "There is no way on earth I wouldn't come to visit her," he mumbled to himself.

She told him about the colours of the sunsets in the mountains, the taste of freshly brewed chai, and the scent of the wildflowers that bloomed in the meadows. He could feel himself listening to her, being next to her, and he kept imagining the way he would caress her, hug her, yet he was so far away. He let his imagination run wild, to the lowest depth and farthest stretch of human capability and imagination. He frequently boasted to his friend Kasia about the progress he had made, taunting her about her own love life. It was undoubtedly hilarious to him. With Azurat, they talked about everything under the sun, from their favourite books and movies to their dreams and aspirations. Aleksander found himself opening up to her in ways he never had

with anyone else before. He felt like he could share his deepest secrets and vulnerabilities with her, and that made their conversations even more special. He couldn't stop thinking about her, and every message he received from her brought a smile to his face. It felt like he was drowning in a sea of emotions. He longed to see her again, to hold her in his arms, and to tell her how much she meant to him. Only a week had gone by and Aleksander had already been head over heels for her. Oftentimes, Kasia would catch Aleksander in one of his daydreaming acts, something he would deeply engage in. It got so bad that sometimes even snapping her fingers in front of his face wasn't enough to focus him again.

Deep in his heart, he knew it would be a while before they could meet again. They exchanged pictures and videos, and Aleksander even started learning Kyrgyz to impress her. He was determined to make their relationship work, no matter what obstacles came their way, for their love was a force that could conquer even the greatest of distances.

Chapter 3: A memory inside the music box

Neja Brumen

A train came to a stop at the lonely station, its brakes screeching on the cold, snowy tracks. A little girl was standing on the platform, carrying her brand new teddy bear in her hands while tightly holding onto her mother, almost as if she would like to hide in the warm embrace. The train driver approached them and kindly offered them an escort inside the train. All of a sudden a melody echoed through the empty station. The girl stopped and looked back over her shoulder with a surprised face. Her eyes slowly started filling up with tears as she ran away and hugged the boy, holding a little music box. Everything became so peaceful, she wished it could stay like that forever. But the children were shortly torn apart by the sound of a whistle coming from the train and its stressed conductor. Just before she boarded the train, the boy placed a music box in her hands. The melody played once again.

Azurat was lying on her warm cosy bed hugging her old teddy bear. The candle was slowly burning out as the tired clock in the corner of her room slowly let the time pass away. She was twirling her silky hair around her finger staring through the window into the chilly darkness. Hiding from the cold and grey reality couldn't last forever.

Almost two decades had passed since that cold rainy night at the train station. She could almost not believe it had been that long. The girl had never quite trusted destiny as life had already scarred her heart. She was asking herself over and over again: 'Could my imagination be messing with me? I know we were children back then but I am quite sure I would never mistake him for someone else.' She checked the phone once again, just to make sure the poems he had written for her were still there, waiting for her. With her eyes closed she admired his emerald eyes sparkling as he laughed and the dimples in his cheeks while the wind was playing with his messy brown hair. Azurat had always adored his charming and endearing sense for nature. There were times when the blooming flowers, endless oceans and mysterious forests reminded her of his unique charisma.

She searched for the music box, the one she had been keeping with her all this time. She opened the cover with a small mirror on it. Her reflection had changed through the years but

Azurat could still see that lonely little girl, lost in a big room. The old and familiar, comforting notes started playing once again. Prokofiev's enchanting and ageless song reminded her of her early childhood in Russia, before she had returned to Kyrgyzstan with her mom. But mostly it reminded her of him. Azurat had never forgotten him, but did he still remember her? She repeated the question in her head as she was running her fingers over the two letters that had been gracefully carved in the tiny mystical music box a long time ago: her initial and another A.

Chapter 4: The rocky, yet beautiful journey

Anastasija Simović

All these years Azurat was wandering through her mind, deepening her imagination about this butterfly effect and how it could affect her destiny. She was a sharp and insightful person, but something about this unwanted and beautiful accident was making her believe that it was more than that. 'I mean, aren't we all looking for answers in our little lives, trying to give it some meaning, trying to be special and reveal the unknown?' Every time that she remembered that day, it came with this bittersweet feeling because even though it was a beautiful memory, it was an unresolved mystery.

Azurat was filling her days with enchanting scenic views on her journey of self realisation. She would spend all days by herself, feeling peaceful in her mind and doing the thing she did best, learning about old traditions and cultures that dated back hundreds of years ago. Trying to understand their way of life and significance, she understood hers more. Being passionate and affectionate about interacting with people was her quality, but too often she was lacking confidence to do it. She had been living in a bubble that she had created and everything in that bubble was secure and continued, yet it made her feel unsteady and desperately alone.

Azurat couldn't shake off the feeling that something was missing in her life. She longed for connection and companionship, but her fear of vulnerability kept her from reaching out to others. Perhaps, she thought, if she took a chance and opened herself up to new experiences and people, she could uncover the missing piece of her life's puzzle. With this newfound determination, Azurat set out to break free from her self-imposed chains to embrace the uncertainty of life.

As the first step of change, she decided to join an excursion organised by her university, and was eagerly anticipating the adventure that awaited her. Azurat was filled with excitement as she boarded the train. She had always been fascinated by the country's rich history and culture, and couldn't wait to explore rich history and culture, and couldn't wait to explore its cities and countryside. As the train chugged along, she watched in awe as the picturesque landscapes passed by, marvelling at the rolling hills, the quaint villages, and the majestic castles perched atop

steep hills. She had done her research beforehand, and had planned out a detailed itinerary to make the most of her trip. From the bustling streets of Berlin to the romanticism of Heidelberg, Azurat was eager to immerse herself in the unique flavours and experiences each city had to offer. But what awaited her at the end of the trip, the sweet surprise that she longed for some time, that was what made a remarkable difference in her life.

Chapter 5: They need some explanation

Pika Marušič

Azurat arrived in Berlin after a day of travel. She stood up to reach for her bags when she was suddenly met by a boy's gaze. She was curious about him.

"Hello, my name is Michael, and who are you?" said the boy before she could respond.

She introduced herself, completely taken aback, and they began talking. Michael was a local who had just returned from Poland, where he had completed his European tour. The train came to a stop before they knew it, and they both rushed to get off. They continued to talk, and he offered to show her around his hometown of Berlin. They talked and laughed, and he even carried her bags.

They decided to meet the next day at the Brandenburg Gate. Azurat and Michael strolled through the city, stopping at various tourist attractions. He bought a curry wurst and a pretzel for each of them. They then found a nice place to eat their lunch. They were talking, laughing, and having the time of their lives when it suddenly became nighttime. Azurat suggested they return to the hotel, but Michael had other ideas. He invited her to a party, which she didn't think much of, so naturally, she accepted.

They went to the hotel, where he made her put on her best party gown, more make-up, and the most beautiful high heels. She didn't care, so she did as he said. They set off and arrived at the party after 20 minutes of walking, which was apparently normal in Berlin. When she saw the house, er, the mansion, she came to a halt, and it became so quiet that they could hear the crickets chirping. She looked at him smiling, and when he returned her smile, her jaw dropped to the ground. 'How is he so wealthy?' He took her hand in his and led her to the front door without making a sound. Everything made sense now, the looks, what she had to wear, but why would someone like him be so nice to a country girl like herself? That made no sense, but something about it intrigued her and made her trust him more than anyone else. They partied and partied, and he introduced her to a few of his friends.

"Can you believe one of them actually flies planes for fun? He even got his first one when he was only five years old."

She suddenly felt some tightness. What was that voice? It sounded so familiar. She looked around the room, shocked to see who was staring at her. It was Aleksander! He stormed out of the house before she could get close enough. She ran after him, and when she caught up with him, he was sitting by a lake, refusing to speak to her.

She wanted to explain herself, but he refused.

"How dare you?" he exclaimed. "I fantasised about the day we'd meet again, and then you betray me like this?"

She immediately felt bad and began telling him about all the times she cried over not seeing him, all the times he visited her in her dreams, and all the times she felt like they were back side by side, but Michael interrupted her before she could finish. Michael's face turned pale and his jaw dropped. He asked her what Aleksander had done to her before punching him in the face. The boys started fighting and Azurat attempted to intervene in the fight and explain herself, but she was too late...

Chapter 6: Sometimes words can be sharper than swords

Sofija Dobrevska

“Stop! Both of you, stop!” Azurat shouted, but they didn’t listen. “Alexander, please, I beg you to stop.”

He seemed like he woke up from a dream and came back to reality when he heard her saying his name. He stopped, stood for a second, and looked at her. She was stunning. She was a grown up now, a bit taller and even more beautiful than the last time he saw her. Her hair was falling on her shoulders, around her neck she was wearing a necklace with a moon on it, and some vintage watch on her left hand. It felt like he was looking at a completely different girl but also at the same time the little girl from the train was still there, hiding behind the glamorous dress and shiny high heels. All he wanted to do right now was to hug her.

“What are you doing? Are you out of your mind?” she nervously asked him and ran to the other guy. “Michael, are you okay? Your nose’s bleeding, oh god, are you all right?”

This couldn't be right. She was mad at Alexander. Before she left, she took a look at him and said: “I can't recognise you anymore, this is not the Alexander I know... or maybe... not the Alexander I thought I knew... not the one I imagined.” And she left with Michael.

That was the moment he realised they weren’t on the same page, at least not at that very moment. He was astonished by her words, his heart pierced when he heard her words. Disappointed, he watched as she helped Michael stand-up, taking his hand around her shoulders trying to help him walk. ‘Who is this guy, is he her friend, boyfriend, how long has she known him to treat him like this, as if I am some stranger that started a fight from nowhere?!’

A few days went by since Alexander came back from Berlin. His backpack was on the bed, the flowers on the shelves were dry. He was sitting on the chair next to the desk.

There was an open big old notebook that he couldn’t stop looking at. On the top right corner of every page, there was a different date, but on every bottom right corner of the page, there was the same inscription: for A. He closed the book as he stood up and went to bed. Then he lay down and turned the music on from his phone. He couldn’t help but cry for the things that could’ve been different. Maybe this was a sign to move on, or maybe a lesson that nothing lasts forever,

not even true love. But he knew that the love for Azurat, his first childish love, would last forever no matter what happened. He couldn't forget all the hours he had spent thinking about the way they had met, their first conversation, the look in her eyes, the things they both wanted and liked. He felt like he would never meet any other person that he could bond with, not like he did with her at least. But, unfortunately, we must all grow up – sooner or later – and face the truth that people change, just like the moon changes every night.

Chapter 7: A stranger with insight into my soul

Ajda Prašnički

Three months had passed since they had last encountered each other. Three long fatigue months for Azurat. As she came back from Berlin, she wasn't her usual self, she closed off to the world around her and she stopped talking to her friends and family. The previous event made her doubt herself and everything she had known until that moment. Alexander's behaviour surprised her, shook her perspective on people, especially the ones she felt most connected to. Like him. A stranger, who had insight into her soul. The only new friend she made in this short time was her new roommate Kasia. She proved to be a lively, outspoken exchange student from Russia. They had known each other for only a week as they had a picnic under ocean blue sky just before the sun came down and the above made Azurat feel something she hadn't felt before.

For the first time in a while she wasn't feeling pressured to act a certain way, do as the others said and she didn't feel judged for only her being. The wondrous sight of bright blue sky and the sweet taste of strawberries in her mouth made her feel full of life, adventurous again and capable of doing anything. She felt like she was standing on top of the world.

"This one is rotten! Like my life back in Russia," sarcastically sad words came out of Kasia and brought Azurat back down to earth. They giggled together while Kasia was throwing rocks in the lake in front of them.

"You know that you haven't told me your full name yet, right?"

On the day of their meeting, Azurat introduced herself as Az. That's how all her friends called her and Kasia seemed like a potential friend.

"Yes, I'm aware of that," said Azurat with an innocent smile on her face.

Kasia interrupted her saying a bit aggressively but not malevolently: "An idea just crossed my mind and it will make me sound like a total psycho. I feel like "I need to break free," as the song says. I feel like wandering carefree. I want to feel the sun kissing my skin while walking down a macadam road. We should go backpacking!" she said. Kasia's words created an image of happiness in Azurat's mind and she knew all along that was all she needed to escape from all her extensive feelings. That was all she needed to escape from Aleksander.

The next day they found themselves exhausted at a petrol station in a small Polish village with extensive back pain and little to no water and food. The summer break just started, the children were running up and down bright green fields, playing, laughing and not worrying about anything.

“How sweet they are! And they have so much energy!” said Kasia with a tired but smiling face. “We need some of what they are on. I think it’s the water here. I’m going to find some of it, so we don’t die, and you go to the petrol station and buy us some food.” They agreed.

As Azurat was walking through the still opening sensor door, she started to feel like her body was an ocean and her mind was deep under its surface. Her blood started to boil lightly as the intensity increased while the notes of Prokofiev’s song on the radio hit her ear. She gathered all she needed and lastly went to check if they had any strawberries. She saw some of the most beautiful and juicy ones, picked them up, took a step forward, looked up while being just before all her blood boiling over. She stood there shocked, looking straight in front of her, right in a young man's eyes. A stranger, who had insight into her soul. She felt all of that boiling blood leave her head as she heard Alexander's voice call her name and Kasia shouting “Is that you?” from the door, right before all Azurat's emotions and woes left her body as she hit the floor.

Chapter 8: A fresh start

Laura Fabjan

Azurat woke up to two doctors, Kasia and Aleksander watching her and giving her cold compresses. She was confused and didn't remember how she ended up in this situation. As she drank some water and ate a protein bar, she slowly started remembering what had happened. Azurat couldn't understand why Alexander was there and why they kept seeing each other in the most random places. Kasia was also in shock since she never expected such a twist.

When Azurat was strong enough to stand up, the medical service team left and Aleksander, Azurat and Kasia decided to go eat lunch in a nearby restaurant. At first, it was really awkward because they were all surprised about the situation they ended up in, but later on they started talking and Azurat and Aleksander acted like nothing had happened between them.

When Kasia went to the toilet, Aleksander seriously asked Azurat how she was. They started talking about their past, Berlin and everything that had happened. Aleksander apologised to her for being so arrogant at that party. Before Kasia returned, he secretly gave her his phone number, hour and place of meeting written on a napkin.

The girls left and went to the hotel they slept in that night. Azurat tried to make Kasia go to bed early so that she could get ready for a secret night date with Aleksander. But Kasia continued talking about him until Azurat faked that she fell asleep. She waited for another thirty minutes so that she could make sure that Kasia was asleep and then left the room.

Aleksander was waiting for her in front of the hotel door ready to take her to a special place. They walked uphill for ten minutes until they arrived at a beautiful little lake. Aleksander immediately took his clothes off and jumped into dark blue water. Azurat repeated after him and next second, they were already splashing each other and laughing like they hadn't in a long time.

After some time of water fun, they climbed to the land, Aleksander wrapped Azurat into a towel. They were really close and silently watching ducks swimming in the lake.

Aleksander offered Azurat a hand and said: "Do you want to start over?"

Azurat gave him a kiss on the cheek and he instantly knew what the answer was.

Chapter 9: A knot in the red string of fate

Marija Andonovska

The red string of fate always manages to wrap itself around the fingers of those who are meant for one another. It may stretch or tangle but one thing is for sure, it will never break. No matter how much they tried to escape, both Aleksander and Azurat were greeted by love at every tiny corner of this loving world.

Everyday since the new start, their days were fulfilled with a love as pure as the children they once were, fulfilling and consuming. Kasia on the other hand somehow managed to recover from the shock that her Az was actually the first love of her closest friend. It was as if both of her worlds had collided. Or perhaps, collapsed. She slowly started to get these thoughts that almost ate her alive. She couldn't stop admiring Azurat's silky hair, her innocent eyes and her loving temper. 'Why is Alexander so enchanted by her?' Everyday she had to witness the love that blossomed in the branches of their hearts. She knew him way long before her and she never managed to get that kind of affection from him. Why? Getting swallowed up by her own twisted mind, she caught herself thinking and feeling sick to her stomach, she couldn't deny the fact that maybe, all this time, she had been in love with him. Aleksander. That once belonged only to her.

Once again a knot tightened in the red thread of destiny.

Chapter 10: Something new and exciting

Zoja Klara Mauhar

When you are in love, time flies. Days turned into weeks, weeks into months and months into a year. It was July and Azurat walked the streets of Berlin in her blue dress with her hair up in a ponytail. She was talking on the phone and quickly moving to the cafe. When she looked up, she saw all of her friends including Kasia in front of the salon. Waiting for her. She ran to them, hugged each of them and together they went inside.

“How are the preparations going?” asked Elenor, one of Azurat's friends. All eyes were on her.

Azurat smiled and said: “Well it is going pretty well, but I am exhausted. There are still a lot of things I have to take care of but I only have a month.”

The wedding was on July the 6th on the beautiful venue that Aleksander and Azurat picked with the help of their dear friend Kasia. She had been there from the beginning watching all ups and downs and she was going to be in the front row, the maid of honour. Both Azurat and Aleksander were very happy to have her by their side but Kasia was devastated. On the outside she was so happy for them but on the inside she was torn apart. On the one hand, she was really happy that they both found their soulmates but on the other, she wished she was that soulmate Aleksander was supposed to find. She was trying to convince herself that Alexander was just a friend but it wasn't going well.

“Kasia, are you there? Kasia!” said Azurat and woke her up from her thinking. “Are you feeling okay?” she asked.

“Yes, of course I am, I just wandered away for a bit,” Kasia said and smiled awkwardly. All the girls smiled and continued talking like nothing happened. Kasia got up and went to the toilet. As she left, Azurat was thinking. She was worried about her friend because she knew something was wrong. She decided that she would talk to her on Tuesday when they were going to meet up to plan the rehearsal dinner.

On Tuesday, Azurat and Kasia were sitting in the kitchen with their heads over the sheet of paper. That paper was the plan for the rehearsal dinner. When Azurat tried to talk to Kasia, Aleksander walked through the door but he wasn't alone. Behind him there was the unknown

man. He was tall, he had brown hair, green eyes and an athletic figure. Kasia was surprised, she had never seen him before but she was pretty sure she knew all of his friends.

They came to the table. Aleksander kissed Azurat and hugged Kasia. The man introduced himself as Matthew. Kasia looked into his eyes and she felt something different, something new and exciting.

Chapter 11: It's time to move on

Bojana Cvetkovska

Her excitement couldn't be hidden. Azurat immediately noticed the red cheeks and smiling lips on her friend's face. Aleksander, like all other men, was more relaxed about the organisation, so he told them:

"Enough with the plans, let's have a drink and something nice to eat. We need to relax." All four sat together. They were laughing and having fun. Kasia was thoughtful at times, her mind wandering somewhere.

It was already late. Kasia was about to leave, and Matthew kindly offered her a ride home. 'Kasia has been strange in recent days, a little unhappy. She deserves to be loved by someone. Now, when we are preparing a wedding, she may feel lonely. I hope that Matthew will be a good influence on her,' thought Aleksander.

That evening, in the car, Matthew and Kasia kept talking. They got along. Kasia didn't expect this, not now when her thoughts were mixed up. 'But maybe this way is better? Aleksander has his own life, and I have my own.' They arrived. When she wanted to say goodbye and get out of the car, Matthew asked her if she wanted him to be her partner at the wedding. She was ashamed and amazed. "Of course I want to. It's a good idea."

She greeted him and ran towards the stairs. Kasia entered the house and wrote a message to Azurat: "Guess who I'm coming to the wedding with!" She threw the phone aside, and went in to take a shower.

The next morning, there was a message on her phone from Aleksander. 'What now? Not again,' she thought...

Chapter 12: Pre-wedding jitters?

Mija Zadavec

After they came home, Aleksander went to bed early. All this preparation for the big wedding exhausted him. He knew how important this occasion was for Azurat. But still, as he lay in their king sized bed in their tiny Berlin apartment, his anxieties grew stronger. They were going to be united by law, in front of their families and friends. What if something went wrong? The ones he cared about, would have front row seats to that spectacle. He could feel Azurat was on edge too, but he couldn't decipher if it was because of the wedding planning or if she felt the same. Don't get him wrong, he truly loved her. But the longer he lay there, drowning in his turmoil, the more he started doubting his decisions that had led up to this.

He remembered the night at the party when that guy Whatshisname had punched him. He remembered the way Azurat had looked at him, her face covered in anger and grief. He remembered how Kasia had comforted him after he had told her what had happened. Back then he could see it in her eyes how she worried about him.

Because when he loved, he loved fully and unconditionally. Love became him and he became love. Sometimes he could get lost in the love and that was what worried him. Did he want to spend the rest of his life completely devoted to someone? But it was Azurat. And it was him. They were meant to be together. Right? They fit together because they loved. And among other things, they loved each other. He remembered what had been written on Azurat's profile all those years ago. Lover of all things beautiful. He too was a lover. Now they were finally lovers together. They finally loved each other together. But why couldn't he shake off this awful feeling like they weren't making the right decision?

When he woke up the next day, he found Azurat lying beside him. There wasn't anything particularly different about her. Her hair was all messed up, there was drool coming out of her mouth and she went to bed with her mascara on again, so it was all smudged around her eyes. But Aleksander couldn't help feeling enchanted by her. He loved this woman. He realised that he would do anything for her. That's when he decided that he would try to fix this gaping hole that grew between them.

He texted Kasia because he didn't know who else to turn to. He asked her if they could meet the same day. As he waited for a response, he got up and made breakfast. He had just put the omelette on the table, when Azurat woke up. She waddled to the table, her eyes still heavy with sleep.

"G'mornin," she mumbled. Aleksander laughed and made her a glass of milk.

They talked about hot gossip, what pet they should get and what made a movie actually good. Aleksander appreciated these kinds of moments and he felt his mood change.

Azurat was looking at her phone, when she suddenly gasped: "Kasia and Matthew are going to come to our wedding together!" she exclaimed.

"What?!" squeaked Aleksander.

Azurat showed him the text message and he raised his fists up in the air and whooped. He was really happy for both of his friends because he knew what wonderful people they were. 'Maybe Kasia will finally meet her soulmate she so desperately craves?'

"Could you imagine if they got together and we got married at the same time?" laughed Azurat. Aleksander knew she was joking, but the weird feeling in his stomach apparently didn't.

"That would be so funny actually!" Azurat looked expectantly at Aleksander, waiting for him to join in on the joke. But Aleksander tensed up and said something vague like

"Oh yeah!" or "Sure!" and then excused himself to go to the bathroom.

In the bathroom, he looked at the way his chest heaved up and down in the mirror. He quickly went to see if Kasia responded to his text. He sighed a gasp of relief when he saw he had received a notification from her. Maybe it was going to be alright after all.

Chapter 13: Love, friends or family?

Lucija Dirnbek

He tried to calm himself down, but a weird knot in his stomach wouldn't go away. He was looking at his phone when he saw a number he hadn't seen in a while appear on the screen. It was his father. He hadn't spoken to him in a long time since their relationship wasn't very good. With shaking hands, he answered the phone as a raspy voice greeted him. Aleksander's eyes filled with horror when his father told him about a deadly disease he had just caught. Doctors told him that he had got only a few months left to live. Aleksander ended the phone call by reassuring his father he would come to Russia as soon as possible. Aleksander felt empty on the inside. He couldn't believe or process what he had just found out. It was like he knew everything was going a little too well to be true. He hurried to Azurat and with tears in his eyes told her what had just happened. Azurat didn't even know how to react. Her heart ached when she saw him like that but she didn't know what to do or how to help, so she just looked at him with pain in her eyes as she tried to hug him, but Aleksander pushed her away. She looked at him surprised, but when she gazed into his eyes, it felt like she was looking at someone else, not the Aleksander she knew and loved. Aleksander loved Azurat but he needed some time alone. He didn't even know why he acted like that or why he pushed her off when she tried to comfort him. He only knew she would never understand and wouldn't easily accept his next words.

"I'm going to Russia," he stated. "We must cancel the wedding," he said while looking bluntly through the window.

He was in so much pain and yet he felt nothing at all. He hadn't talked to his dad in more than a year but now that he heard he was dying, he felt like the world was about to collapse. All around himself, he had people who loved him, but still, he felt so alone.

Azurat tried to be understanding but she couldn't help but to feel offended as he told her his decision. Most of all it hurt her that she couldn't help him. She didn't understand why he couldn't trust her and although she knew he was the victim here, she couldn't help but feel hurt. Overwhelmed with emotions, she rushed out of the apartment as Aleksander on the other side of the room started mindlessly packing warm clothes in an old suitcase.

Everything after that happened so quickly. Without even realising it, Aleksander was sitting alone on a plane to Moscow trapped with dark thoughts in his head. He thought of his father, Kasia, and his friend but mostly he thought about Azurat wondering if he had made the right decision. They were so close but yet he felt so distant from her. He could only hope they would be able to resolve whatever was going on between them. But first, he had to get to his father.

The plane soon landed and Aleksander drove to his childhood home. As he opened the front door, he was taken aback by the memories this place evoked. He felt grief, sadness, nostalgia, and a sort of happiness while looking around the room he just walked into. His eyes landed on a small wooden box. It was an old music box with nothing but two initials on it. He was suddenly fazed by memories it filled him with. Everything he remembered felt like a fading dream, as snippets of memories about a snowy night and a little girl came flooding back to him.

“Aleksander! Is this you?” yelled an old man from the next room.

Aleksander shook as if awakened from a dream and rushed to the room his sick father was lying in.

Chapter 14: We all need a little push sometimes

Ema Madzovska

Sometimes we need our memories refreshed by the ones that know us best, the closest people to our heart. Alexander's father was not the best father figure in Alexander's childhood, but he loved him like a father loves a son and there was nothing that could break that shatterproof bond.

Sitting stiffly next to his father, with watery eyes and a soft depressing smile Alexander was looking at his old man. Both confused and not saying a word, waiting for the brave one to break the silence.

“How are you dad? What did the doctors say?” Alexander worryingly asked.

“You know son, since you were little, I had problems with my heart, and now these problems have gotten pretty serious because of my old age, but the doctors say I will be okay if I follow the treatment. But my question is how are you doing? I haven't seen you in months.”

“School is going well, Berlin is a wonderful city, I love it there and now I have met the love of my life and as I wrote to you, we are planning a wedding.”

“Son, the reason you are here is because I must tell you something that happened a week ago and I think you should know before you put that wedding ring on. Your friend Kasia visited me and your mother here. She was polite and as sweet as when she was a child, she brought chocolates for us from Berlin and something else. She brought one of the music boxes, you both had to exchange that day at the train station before she went abroad with her family. The day you gave the music box to the little girl from the train.”

In Alex's mind memories started to evoke, confused ones, weird ones, his stomach was twirling upside down and it was just because he had realised what Kasia was telling him with the bringing of the music box.

When Alex made sure his father had all the supplies and financial stability to obtain his medical treatment, he caught the first flight to Berlin. On the way there, he was scrolling through his life like a book, analysing every memory with Kasia, every conversation, every

misunderstanding, every lunch they had together.

When he entered the apartment, Azurat was waiting for him. He looked into those blue eyes once again, that silky hair and that soft face of hers and knew that they would never come close to what he felt when he looked at those brown dazzling eyes.

Chapter 15: The best mistake ever

Teja Bernik

He knew that he had to do something but how would he tell Azurat? 'Will she hate me? Does Kasia feel the same when she looks into my eyes? Even if she does, would she want to be with me knowing it could hurt her friend?'

The next day he decided to fix things. He told Azurat they needed to talk. He spent a few minutes explaining the situation with his father, how it opened his eyes and how he realised that they almost jumped into marriage way too fast and he didn't even have the time to think his feelings through. He told her that his feelings for Kasia seemed to be stronger than those of friendship and he had to tell her because she was an amazing person who deserved to be happy and loved by someone who only had space for her in his heart.

Azurat, just like anyone in this situation, was shocked, upset and devastated when she found out that the person she was ready to spend the rest of her life with didn't want to even be her boyfriend. She told him to tell Kasia about his feelings but she needed some time to work through on her own and needed to spend some time away from him and Kasia.

With that, they came to an agreement that he had to move out. He packed his essentials in a suitcase, left their apartment and checked himself into a hotel down the street. At the hotel, he took a refreshing shower and threw some clothes on to go to the hotel bar. After a few glasses of whiskey and a cigarette or two, he finally mustered up the courage to send Kasia a text inviting her to coffee. After she responded, he spent the rest of his night crying over all the wrong decisions he had made in his life. He realised that Azurat was the best mistake he had ever made in his life and if he could do it all again, he would date her again because she had taught him so much about who he was, what he liked, disliked, who the people he wanted around were and who not, and he would be forever grateful for everything she had done for him.

When the highly awaited coffee meet finally neared, he felt more nervous than ever. He even arrived at the cafe a few minutes early. He chose a table next to a window and a seat overlooking the city to calm him down. He had to wait for quite a while as Kasia was running late. When she finally entered the cafe with a smile on her beautiful face, her hair up in a messy bun that looked

especially good on her that day, wearing old sweatpants and a random white t-shirt, he realised that he had made the right decision keeping her glistening brown eyes close.

She sat down and said that she was really happy he texted her as she had to tell him something. "Matthew and I have decided to officially begin dating."

Chapter 16: Something's gone terribly wrong

Kim Butalič

His face went still. Out of all the things he expected her to say, this was definitely not it. He couldn't tell her any more how he felt about her. Kasia was still smiling, waiting for an answer.

After a few moments of silence, she asked: "Are you okay?"

Alexander slowly smiled and said: "Yes, of course. I'm happy for you two." But on the inside he wasn't that happy. It was true he wanted her to be happy, but on the other hand, he had feelings for her.

"So," she said, with curiosity in her eyes. "Is there something you wanted to tell me?"

"Oh, it's really nothing important." He had to remember something to talk about. He quickly remembered his father. "I wanted to thank you for visiting my father. I still can't believe he has a few months left."

"With pleasure. I'm really sorry. I know it must be hard for you." She hugged him. "Do you want me to do something to cheer you up?" Kasia asked.

"Oh, no. You've done enough. Thank you."

After she told him about her and Matthew, his face changed. He was sad, but he didn't want her to know. After that, they said goodbye and separated, Alexander went back to the hotel. He felt empty. He didn't know what to do. Now he didn't have neither Azurat nor Kasia.

The next day he texted Azurat to come and meet him. She replied a few minutes later.

Azurat: I don't really want to talk to you. Sorry.

Aleksander: Please, it's important.

Azurat: Fine.

He could tell she was mad at him.

Aleksander: Meet me at the café down the road at noon.

He went there a little earlier. Five minutes later Azurat came.

"I don't have all day, so just say whatever you want to tell me."

"I'm sorry for what I said, I regret breaking up with you. Let's forget about it and just move on," Alexander said.

Azurat couldn't believe him. He broke up with her like it was nothing. And now he wanted her back. "No. You can't just break someone's heart and come back two days later and fix it. It doesn't work like that. You have feelings for Kasia! And now you want to be with me. I really don't understand you! I'm going to go now." And then she left.

Kasia heard all that. She was also in the café. Neither of them noticed her. Was that what Alexander wanted to tell her?

Alexander left right after Azurat. He didn't want to talk to her.

He went back to the hotel. He drank that night. In fact he drank the next day, too.

After that day, there was no alcohol left in his room so he went to the store to buy more. He wasn't a big drinker. But previous days were bad, really bad. He lost both of them. He got to his car. He saw Kasia in the parking lot. When she saw him, she started to walk towards him. He got in the car quickly and started driving. Kasia then turned around. He clearly didn't want to talk to her. He was thinking about Kasia and Azurat and he wasn't paying attention to the road. His car slipped off the road and crashed into a building. His last thoughts were 'My father needs me. I can't die now.' And then everything went black.

Chapter 17: The voices inside

Marta Lazarevska

All Alexander could hear were faint voices around him. He still didn't have the strength to open his eyes and look around or to speak, but he tried to follow up on the conversation in the room. He could mostly hear doctors but one voice caught his attention. Kasia. Tons of questions came to his mind flashbacks of what had happened earlier. What he couldn't answer himself was how she knew what had happened or who called her.

The truth was that after she saw the condition he was in, Kasia got worried because of his strange behaviour and went after him so she was able to get help right away. After some time, he was able to get his strength back and regain his full consciousness, but he kept his eyes shut for a little while, giving him time to take a break and think through the last few days. There was a strange feeling growing in him, something between the joy that she was there and the feeling of confusion about what he should do next. 'Do I tell her how I feel? How did I end up thinking that she might be Miss Right when there is only a slight chance of us being together? Or should I let her live her life stepping away just like she did because the other person's happiness is more important than my own?' The lack of easiness answering any of these questions made him wonder whether this was what real love looked like. 'Knowing someone for so long that you can say you know him better than you know yourself yet you can't seem to figure out what his reaction or answer will be - is this the beauty of it? The differences? But if I want an answer, I will need to speak to her because any answer that I come up with right now would be neither mine nor hers.'

As he began waking up, he spotted her in the corner right away.

Chapter 18: Resolve

Eva Jakimovska

He watched as she leaned forward in her chair, studying him closely. He knew that look; she was worried sick about him. Alexander took a deep breath and opened his eyes, meeting Kasia's gaze. She smiled softly at him, relief washing over her features.

"Hey there," she said, her voice filled with concern.

He tried to speak, but his throat was dry and scratchy.

"Water," he croaked out, his voice barely above a whisper.

Kasia quickly poured a glass of water from the pitcher on the bedside table and helped him take a sip. He felt the cool liquid slide down his throat, soothing the dryness.

"How are you feeling?" Kasia asked.

Alexander closed his eyes, taking a moment to collect his thoughts. "I'm okay, I guess," he replied slowly. "Still a little foggy, but I'm getting there."

Kasia nodded understandingly. "The doctors said you were lucky. You had a concussion and some bruises, but nothing too serious."

He nodded, grateful for her presence and her concern. There was a brief moment of silence before he decided to take a deep breath and say what was on his mind.

"Kasia, I need to talk to you about something."

She sensed the seriousness in his tone, knowing what followed next. "That's one way to say it. Go ahead."

Alexander hesitated for a moment before finally speaking the words that had been weighing on him for so long. "I know I've never said this before, but I love you, Kasia. I have loved you for a long time. For what you had to witness some time ago, I feel ashamed. I have put you in an impossible situation. Seeing you here now, I wonder why you have done this?"

Kasia's expression softened, but he could see the sadness in her eyes. "Alexander, I care about you deeply. You're one of my closest friends, so I can easily put everything that happened in a small box and slide it underneath a carpet. As a friend, I will always be by your side."

Alexander took a deep breath, trying to absorb Kasia's words. He felt a sense of relief wash over him as he realised that their friendship wasn't going to be affected by his confession. "Thank you, Kasia," he said, his voice cracking slightly. "I appreciate your understanding."

As the days passed, Alexander reflected on everything that had happened. He realised that he had been so caught up in his own feelings that he had lost sight of what was truly important. But as he lay in his hospital bed, he realised that he needed to prioritise himself. He needed to work on his own happiness and on the mistakes he had made in the past, before he could even think about pursuing a romantic relationship. He needed to take time to reflect, to figure out who he was and what he truly wanted in life.

Title of the Chapter 19: Rubia

Jane Monevski

*“Life blooms like a flower, far away or by the road,
Waiting for the one, to find the way back home...”*

She sang. Her soft voice echoing in the night. “Time flows across the world, there is always a longer way to go...” she went on, with every word getting heavier and heavier. Her chest felt piercing, her thoughts uneasy. Was this really what she deserved? Azurat couldn’t hold herself anymore. She slowly sat down on the bridge’s fence. “The moon is beautiful tonight, isn’t it?”

Silence. “Yes, it truly is.” Aleksander smiled through his stream of tears. He breathed very fast. Running from the hospital bed in the middle of the night was not on his schedule.

“I thought you wouldn’t come, Alex.”

“It was you who asked first, Az.”

He slowly started walking towards her. “Here.” A simple music box was given to her. “I won’t try to stop you. I always wanted you to be happy. And I wish I could help you.”

“I wished I could help you too, when you told me about your father. That means we’re even then?”

Silence. A small chuckle was heard.

“Do you truly wish to do this?” there was a bittersweet scent in the air.

“I’ve come all this way, which would mean I am. Have this last dance with me, will you?” Azurat smiled, as if all of her problems were gone at that moment.

Aleksander took her hand and she opened the music box. It had been broken, so the only lines it was singing were,

*“Life blooms like a flower, far away or by the road,
Waiting for the one, to find the way back home...”*

They danced under the moonlight, and it felt like an eternity. But eternity is far too cruel of a fate for their love.

The movements were slowing down, and she finally let go.

"Till I reach your arms, A madder there for you."

She said smiling, and jumped over the fence. Her wavy gold locks were like the roots of tachigali versicolor. Spreading her arms out, trying to embrace her last moments of fresh air. He tried to rush and save her, but he was frozen. He knew that this would happen. Her last message told him exactly that. And then the loud splash in the river was heard. It couldn't be kept in anymore. He broke down, and went to the hospital, crying. He cried the whole night, and the whole other day. Kasia learnt the news soon after. Everybody did. But the music boxes could still be heard. One for the hopeful, one for the lost, and one for the deceased. Kasia, Aleksander, and Azurat. Kasia hoped for a better life, and passed the hope to Yevdokim, for him to get better with the treatment. Aleksander lost himself while searching for the red string, but Azurat had cut it with her own life.

"In the last blow of wind, not yet for the story on the last page."

Chapter 20: Finding the missing piece of the life's puzzle...

Daria Dejanovska

After many years of heartache, accompanied by the feeling of loneliness, Alexander found himself standing by the ocean's edge, his gaze fixed on the luscious blonde hair and the familiar, glooming smile. It was a moment of profound reflection, a reminder of the choices and consequences that had shaped his life. As he watched the waves crash against the shore, memories of Azurat flooded his mind. He couldn't help but feel a pang of regret for the decisions he had made. Azurat had been his best mistake - a beautiful soul he was meant to marry, but the realisation of his love for those brown dazzling eyes that he always kept closer, had altered their fate, leaving Azurat shattered and ultimately leading her down a path of darkness and despair. The weight of his choices had been heavy upon Alexander's shoulders. In losing both Azurat and Kasia, he had become consumed by loneliness and a constant search for happiness. But he had come to realise that some things clouded his vision and caused him to lose sight of what truly mattered. With a renewed sense of purpose, he made a decision to confront his past, to confront the questions that he had for years. Setting foot on a journey of self-discovery, Alexander delved into his own soul. He was seeking forgiveness for his mistakes and searching for a way to honour the memory of both Azurat and Kasia. He began to untangle the threads of his heart. He realised that true happiness did not lie in the pursuit of fleeting desires, but in cherishing the connections that mattered most. He understood that love was not a simple thing, but a complex composed from trust, compassion and sacrifice. As Alexander turned his attention back to the present moment, he found himself standing before his daughter—a precious gift from the ashes of his past. Her luscious blonde hair shimmered in the sunlight, and her cute little glooming smile mirrored the beauty, the beauty that reminded him of Azurat. In her blue innocent eyes, he saw a reflection of the love he had lost, a love that had transformed him. With a newfound clarity, Alexander embraced his daughter, trying to protect her with all the love he possessed.

And so, with his daughter's hand in his, Alexander stepped on a new chapter - one that celebrated the past, acknowledged the mistakes he had made and embraced the future with an open heart. In the loving bond they shared, he found his purpose, the key to his own happiness.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, Alexander knew that he had finally found his peace. It was a peace born of acceptance, forgiveness, understanding of the value of true love. And as he walked into the twilight, hand in hand with his daughter, he carried within him the spirits forever attached in his heart - a reminder of the life lessons he had learned.

