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Sardaana Kokolova

**The
cancellation**

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«Издательские решения»

Kokolova S.

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Love cancelled. Yes, the power of love is limitless. Before you roll up your eyes, try to imagine that the only way to be saved is to love.

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The cancellation

I was the one who was cancelled.

It happened in an instant. And there was no turning back. No matter how hard I tried. There was no chance. Only time could bring me back. But it's gone.

It all started with a simple desire to be useful. I wished I could understand what was wrong with being helpful. But that day I should have passed it by and thought about myself.

My name is Mika. I'm 25 years old. I dreamed of a beautiful, comfortable life. I finished the 9th grade. Got a job at a factory. Was drafted into the army. Did my service. Came back. Got another job. It's a simple very ordinary life. I was raised by strict parents. And their parents were even stricter. Everyone had their own struggle. Our family, like everyone else who survived the "Millennium War," tried to survive. Each tried in their own way.

The "Millennium War" was the complete destruction of energy systems around the world in a single migration. What the science fiction and all the blessed souls on the street warned about had come true. As a result of a simple mistake, the world was left without electricity. All efforts to overcome the energy crisis had only led to countries becoming increasingly isolated. everyone retreated into isolation, trying to secure their energy resources. This didn't stop others, but only provoked them into an even more dire survival situation.

As a result of cascading failures, the energy grid of all countries failed, and the Earth collapsed into darkness. Realizing that the world would never be the same, everyone solved the problems on their own and started from scratch.

The world took a very long time to recover. Everyone lived in poverty and in shortages of the most basic things. Memories of their past happy lives were still fresh. So people tried to cling to the new day with all their might and somehow endure.

I was raised by my grandparents. I hardly knew my parents. They were always at work. Moreover, the outstanding elders were unquestionable. All their juniors were completely subordinate, and this continued down to the very last junior. A clear hierarchy was maintained, with no room for questioning. No one would dare contradict.

After the "Thousand-Year War," energy was incredibly expensive. Living with your parents was considered abnormal. As soon as you reached adulthood, you were on your own. And you tried to survive as best you could. So, after finishing school, I was moved to a separate room on the other side of town. There, I survived. No one was my reason. All the questions — what to eat, how to live, how to pay, where to get it, and how much it cost — I decided for myself. The only saving grace was having a roof over my head. Although a two-by-two-meter room hardly felt like a home. But I was glad of that. As a result, my classmates were less fortunate. Their parents kicked them out onto the street even without that.

I woke up before dawn. The room was cool and dark. I always had trouble getting up and liked to lie around for a few more minutes. But the habit of "rising quickly" was ingrained in me since childhood. So, as soon as I throw back the covers, the cozy warmth instantly disappeared. Without getting dressed, yearning for warmth, I quickly washed, dressed, and ran to work.

As I walked quickly through the factory, I thought I hadn't heard from my mother in a while. And I only heard about my father from her. He never let me know. Never asked how I was doing. And then I realized I hadn't been to see them in a while.

It was sunny today. I always try to look at the clouds. If you watch it long enough, you can understand it. I generally believe that the world speaks to us. We just don't pay attention to it. And today, the change of season is especially noticeable in the air. The morning is getting cooler and the heat is gone. Soon the leaves will begin to turn yellow. I consider it a harbinger of autumnal changes.

Everything changes in autumn. Not just nature. I noticed that many changes in my life occurred in autumn, too.

I first fell in love with her in the fall. She was so beautiful against the red maple leaves. White skin, sparkling eyes, and a shock of black hair. Proud posture and slender shoulders. I was enchanted. I knew I'd never dare approach her. But I couldn't take my eyes off her. Sabi. We lived next door. And we were even in the same classes at school. But she doesn't remember me. At worst, that's not an option. For her, I might have just been a familiar face. I'd gotten used to her, to seeing her every day.

Today, she was still just as beautiful. And unattainable.

"Maybe I should just decide now and talk to her? About what? If she hasn't looked your way before, then it's not worth starting" — I replayed this dialogue in my head every time I saw her. But I still hadn't brought myself to it.

The bus pulled up. Sabi and I walked to the doors. But then Grandma appeared in front of us — a dandelion of a woman. She was thinking about climbing the steps of the bus. But she was noticeably heavy.

"Grandma, let me help you."

"Oh, son, help me. I just can't do it. My legs won't obey me," — I grabbed her elbow with one hand, and Sabi was with the other.

And we joined her on the bus together. We helped her tense up on the seat by the door. She thanked us. And suddenly we looked at each other. For the first time. I realized this was my chance to talk to her. But she lowered her eyes and stepped aside. I had to stand next to her. Oh well. I won't rush her. I've been waiting for her until this day.

In a couple of stops, Sabi and I had to get off. We started moving toward the exit. We didn't speak, but we understood each other without words. I let her through and stood next to her, ready to catch her if the bus braked sharply.

As soon as the bus began maneuvering toward the stop, someone grabbed my hand. It turned out to be that grandmother.

"Help me get off. I need to get off," she said, grabbing my hand. I looked at Sabi. She smiled faintly and got off at the stop. I wanted to follow her, too. But what could I do? I had to help the grandmother, who had become even more clumsy. And it seemed she was deliberately delaying me. I decided to help her and then catch up with Sabi.

We somehow got off the bus. But the grandmother wouldn't let go of my hand. She clung to it with all her might. She said something about knee pain. And loneliness. And lost relatives. I didn't understand anything. I only knew she wouldn't let me go. And there was no way to catch up with Sabi. I decided to walk the old lady home. I was late anyway. And she clearly needed my help.

I took her string bag. She continued to hold tightly to my hand. And we walked leisurely down the street. I tried to keep up with her, but I wanted to make it clear that I needed to see her off without delay. The old lady kept repeating something about her bad knees and relatives who had left her alone.

Her house turned out to be close to the bus stop. I handed over the string bag and was about to run back. But she wouldn't let me go and asked me to go inside and help with a window she couldn't close. And the forecast said it would rain that night.

"To close the window? it's not a big deal," I thought. And I went into the house. It was larger inside than it looked from the outside. She pointed to the kitchen window. It really was difficult to close. It took some fiddling. I even broke a sweat. The old woman offered me a glass of water. I drank it. And...

I woke up on the couch. I was lying down. I opened my eyes. It was dim. The curtains were drawn. I couldn't tell what time it was. There was no one in the room. I tried to remember what I was doing, why I was here.

I only remembered Sabi, the bus, the old woman, and the window. Then emptiness. Nothing.

I tried to get up. My head was spinning slightly. And I felt a strange weakness throughout my body.

— Woke up... — someone spoke faintly from a dark corner.

— Who are you? Where am I?

— Don't remember? Take your time. There's no need to rush now.

— What are you talking about? I have to run. I'm already late. What time is it? What's going on anyway?

— Calm down. Don't make any noise. She doesn't like noise.

— Who? What are you talking about?

— Remember the old woman?

— Well. I helped her today.

— So, you're so kind. Always willing. Reliable. Couldn't you pass by? Me too. Now it's all over. There's nothing left, — the voice faded, as if disappearing into the darkness.

“Hey! Wait, what are you talking about? Where are you? What's going on?” But the voice faded, and it was impossible to see anything in the darkness. I tried to stand again. My legs felt like cotton wool and wouldn't obey me. My ears were ringing. And my head was empty, like after a heavy drinking session.

I fumbled for the doorknob and stepped out into the hallway. It was quiet. In the gloom, I spotted the exit. The light from the small window barely filtered through the thick glass. How hard it was to walk. I staggered to the door.

“You'll want to come back, but you can't,” the voice whispered behind me. The cold made me cringe, and the adrenaline gave me strength. I yanked the doorknob hard. The fresh air finally brought me back to my senses.

It was the dead of night. I looked around. I saw a familiar store sign blinking on the street corner. The windows glowed with hope.

I ran inside. The clerk was my neighbor and had often helped me out during times of famine. We became friends when I helped him during the flood. Back then, we guarded the store from looters for weeks. A couple of years had passed since then. But we often reminisced about those days.

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