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MAD LOVE by Can Divit

I'll never forget that day: a cloudy day in April. On board of my yacht a soft breeze was blowing my hair, the waves were crashing to the hull and the wind started rising when I decided to dock my boat, fearing a storm. At the pier I met a seaman. He advised me not to leave since it was going to rain and showed me how to get to the centre of the village. While walking, I went past a library and saw a huge crowd standing up after a meeting. I went on following my way.

Suddenly a thunder broke the stillness around and the people altogether moved quicker and quicker. It had started to rain. I had nothing to put on except for my hood. I decided to take refuge somewhere when I saw a cinema. "Bad King" was on. I went in and straight to the ticket office.

Before me there was no long queue: simply a young girl wearing a long, ochre overcoat with brown and golden embroidery. She wore rings and bracelets and dressed in an ethnic style very similar to mine. There was something familiar about her. I could not say what but I thought she was not known to me. I felt confused. She fixed up her hair wet with rain. As she was arranging her hair, an exciting and unforgettable scent overwhelmed me. It was strong, intense, but pleasant and sweet. It immediately reminded me of the magic moments I had spent with the unforgettable girl of my lost love and realised it was her. My Sanem.

Was that possible? She was standing there, before me. I could not see her face to face. Only her shoulders were in front of me but the memory of our time together did not betray me as did not her inebriating fragrance that made me out of thought. And, it was then that I felt lost and afraid. I bought the ticket and quickly reached the cinema hall. She was sitting in one of the first rows. I sat some rows behind her. I did not want her to see me. I could not stand the emotion and could not even stare back at her. I was not ready. I felt I could panic.

Darkness was surrounding us and my thoughts had plunged into darkness as well. I tried to concentrate on the film, but I could not. My eyes kept falling on her. She was the real movie: when I saw her laughing, I remembered the smiles we used to share and felt relieved. But soon *The Bad King* made her cry and I felt guilty. I had also been her bad king. All of a sudden, overcome with emotions I was compelled to leave the cinema. Once and again I had left her alone! I did my best to reach my boat and I strode there.

The next day, I was ready to set sails. I was lifting the ladder when someone knocked on it with a walking stick. She was Aunt Remide. I was surprised to find her there. How could she know? She asked me where I was going and said we had to talk. I invited her on the yacht for her a cup of Turkish tea. She told me what had happened after my departure and we shared a conversation about my work, my family, my friends and, at the end, she spoke about Sanem. Then I discovered she had to stay at a psychiatric hospital. My departure and the lack of any information about me had shocked her. She had fallen into serious depression. I was speechless and could not believe my ears.

Sanem was now living in that village, in the country side and shared a house with a friend. She took care of her and helped her forget her traumatic memories. Aunt Remide told me Sanem had published a novel that had been translated into most of the languages in the world. Before saying goodbye Aunt Remide gave me a present, wrapped up into an elegant purple paper. She hugged me and left. Now, I was really alone with the burden of heavy thoughts and a sense of guilt. Nostalgia was overwhelming me and what I wanted most was to find a way to get rid of my sins.

I did not leave immediately. I did not know why. I was ashamed of myself and unable to recognise to myself I did not want Sanem to feel abandoned again. Besides I had to find a place to buy something to eat and drink. My resources were over.

I went off the boat. I was strolling through the streets of the village, when I met a girl. She recognised me, but I did not. She introduced herself: her name was Nazli. She was a Sanem's friend. She said she had recognised me from the photos Sanem had showed her. The girl was slim, short with long, red, straight hair that stood out her pale face. She was wearing a purple, decorated, stylish dress (different from Sanem's new style). Nazli asked me to talk for a while and I nodded.

We went for a cup of tea and she told me Sanem had phoned her that very morning, because she thought she had seen me at the cinema. Nazli did not hide said Sanem had suffered a lot and advised me to forget her and go away for her sake. She said my presence would be a new and terrible breakdown. I felt speechless and annoyed. I knew I had made so many mistakes, but now I was there and I wanted to meet Sanem and make amends.

When I came back on the jetty, I saw Aunt Remide's present on the seat. It was just where I had left it, still there. I spent the whole all night on my yacht, lulled by the waves. I felt almost swallowed by the dark-blue of the sea. I knew what it was that made me feel uneasy. I looked at the parcel doubtful whether to open it or not. I felt exhausted with a great unbearable burden inside. My heart was screaming. It shouted to open it, but I still did not know if I was ready to read it. I was afraid to look at myself in the mirror of Sanem's novel.

In the end I strengthened myself and opened the parcel. It was a book. The cover was blue with two birds. I read the title: The Phoenix and the Albatross and the novelist's name: Sanem Aydin. I was right it would tell about me. She used to call me the Albatr and so I supposed she was the Phoenix. But, differently from our story in the cover the two birds were coming out of a big sun.

Albatrosses are white, large seabirds. They are among the most spectacular gliders of all birds, able to stay aloft in windy weather for hours without ever flapping their extremely long, narrow wings. According to the myth, instead, the Phoenix is a fabulous bird associated with the worship of the sun, as large as an eagle, with brilliant scarlet and gold plumage. Ancient folks used to associate the Phoenix with immortality, resurrection and life after death.

I was afraid but curious at the same time. I checked the back of the novel to read the plot and I turned the book upside down. I skipped the introduction and I read the epigraph. It said: "...he left me burned pages with broken dreams ...".

I would have liked keeping the read, but I couldn't stand the heartache the words had caused me. My eyes glistened. At once all my mistakes, wrong decisions, words, and unlucky actions together with my guilt and memories came to surface and I felt the worst pain I had ever experienced.

I put the novel on the seat and I moved away from it, distance between the object and me could erase all that was haunting me. The wind blew the wrapping paper away but I was too absent minded to worry about it. I remained still, looking at the sky and the sea. They both were dark as were my mind and my heart. I desperately tried to keep out the memory of that night.

The next morning, while I was docking the yacht at the pier, I saw something strange in the seawater. I checked and I found a little plastic bottle with a note. Taken by curiosity I opened it and read the message. The same sentence I had read the night before appeared to my eyes: "...he left me burned pages with broken dreams...". I could no longer cope with the situation and almost instinctively I decided I would go to the nearby village to ask for Sanem's address.

While going back to the yacht, I saw a girl, sitting on the pier. She was alone and powerless. A sense of solitude, melancholy and sadness was what I perceived as I looked at her. Everything was still around. There was no noise, but for the sound of the waves. I moved forward and I recognised her: she was Sanem. She was wearing a long, red skirt, a black top and lots of ethnical jewellery. I slowed down my pace and stopped. I was really worried about her. She looked motionless, unmoved, and defenceless in front of the surrounded nature. Her looks sounded lost in an infinite void. I saw her in the distance. She was quivering in the style of a mentally ill girl.

Immediately after she turned towards me. Our gazes crossed for a while. I tried to take courage and I moved close to her. She stood up quickly and as if she were a robot she ran away.

I expected Sanem would escape from me, but not that way. I felt as if I were her worst enemy. She did not even look at my face. She was avoiding me. I did not understand as if she did not want to listen to me. Therefore, I called her name loudly again and again. She turned towards me with two big scared eyes. She was glancing at me as if I were a danger, something menacing. Suddenly, her expression changed: she looked confused and perplexed. We exchanged inquisitive looks, but none of us were able to speak. I lent my hand to her and touched her wrist. I could feel her heart was beating fast. She hesitated and moved back. On a second moment she asked me why I had gone there and insisted questioning. I did not know how to start answering and so I kept silent. She got annoyed and went away straightforward. I wondered whether to talk to her, but I was confused. I did not know how to behave. I had felt guilty and unable of any reaction. A lump in the throat forbade me from speaking.

In the evening I thought a lot and I decided to visit her. I was resolute and wanted to talk to her. I wanted to tell her of the mistakes I had done. After all I thought we would be able to get on well together, as had happened in the past. When I reached Sanem's home that night she was out, in the garden, preparing her fragrance and crushing some flowers in a pestle. She was wearing a white dress. It stood out against the sunset colours surrounding her. All her working table was scattered with flowers and scented candles. I appeared behind her and called her name. She immediately froze. I was surprised by her stillness, and all of my self-assurance fell: why did she not react? Why was speaking together so difficult for us?. She went on with her working, as if she did not mind my presence and put even more strength in her pestle.

I moved closer and asked her if I could take her perfume sample. After a few seconds, she nodded. I took it slowly, because I was looking forward to her reaction. I focussed my attention on her and I noticed some birds were embroidered on her dress. They reminded me of Albatrosses. They have only one partner during all their life. On that moment, I understood she was my "one" and I asked her shyly: "How did we get so far?"

She started crushing flowers with more energy and rather irritated answered: "I don't know... but it was all on you!" I realized she did not feel my same emotions. The atmosphere became tense and unpleasant. I said goodbye and went away regretful.

I got onto my yacht, started the engine and weighed anchor. I was desolate. I knew what I was doing. I knew leaving the village meant I would lose Sanem once and forever. But I didn't want to stop. I acted as I usually did. I lent my mind free control over my choices, so that no irrational thought could have stopped me from doing what was right.

Right, I did not think going away from that place was a mistake. It sounded as if both did not take care about each other. The words we had not been able to share a few minutes earlier confirmed it. The best thing for both of us seemed we had part.

I put a hand into my pocket and I found her kerchief. Once and again I could smell her perfume. The scent reminded me of all our happiest and dramatic moments and all the time I had spent with her. The smiles and tears we shared came to mind. They were all the memories and the most important emotions I had recorded so far. I took a deep breath. I wanted to remember all that but at the same time I felt the need to leave behind all that Sanem had meant and still meant to me.

I was still sitting and I saw her novel before me. It was under the yacht's wheel. It sounded as if it were waiting for me and trying to hold me back from my choice. I finally opened it. I was going to read something and to let all the past inside those pages. I opened a page at random, but as soon as I started reading, I heard Sanem's voice. It was as if she were there with me, reading and repeating the same words she used to say when we were together. The echoed loudly in my heart.

It was then, I understood I did not want to run away from my past. I did not want to escape my problems, but most of all I did not want to go away from Sanem again. She was too important, maybe the most important one. I could have never left her, not now when I had just met her again. For the very first time in my life, I let my feelings take control of my body and I made a crazy choice. I went below deck and took a fuse off the engine. I threw the fuse into the sea. The yacht was now stuck. I still do not know the reason why I made that choice. I was not at all sure about my future.

But now, I am here, in the middle of the sea, undecided between love and freedom. The crashing waves, that subtle and fascinating feeling of danger, of being ready to be dragged away at any moment still makes me think ...