

Judita Horvátová

When love hurts...



JUDITA HORVATOVA
WHEN LOVE HURTS...

PUBLISHER
JUDITA HORVATOVA
2022

Copyright © Judita Horvatova 2021
English translation © Judita Horvatova 2022
Illustration © Klara Hyncicova
Cover design © Nikola Demjanova
First edition: E-book PDF
Publisher © Judita Horvatova
Year of publication © 2022

ISBN: 978-80-570-3748-4

RARE GIFTS

**Friendship and love
belong to those precious gifts in human life,
which quietly, unnoticed disappear
if we don't care about them.
And it's so hard to find them again.**

**We were sure
that it would never happen to us.
But life brings pitfalls.
And one finds out that sometimes
even great love succumbs.**

CHAPTER ONE: LOVING

I'm lying alone in our bed. I'm wearing a seductively short nightgown, but it's useless to me. Not that it is silky, or translucent, super sexy. Nothing like this. It's just short. I like the nightgown very much because of the material. It is cotton. I only wear it in the summer because it has short sleeves and I would be cold in it in other months. Actually, I haven't tried it yet. Only now. But I'm not thinking about the cold now. I am lying motionless, silent like a mouse, all alone in a double bed in our downstairs bedroom and listening with bated breath to see if anything moves upstairs.

I really want to hear the rustling of slippers on the floating floor upstairs. My husband is a slipper type. Nobody else in the family must always have slippers on his feet, just him. When he gets home, the first thing he always does is that he puts on his slippers. I do not care. Sometimes I wear them, other times I don't, but I constantly leave them somewhere and then look for them, so I prefer not to wear them at all. And I indeed love to walk barefoot.

Sometimes his slippers get entirely on my nerves, but now I would not mind giving whatever just to hear them. And then step by step as he tiptoes down the stairs. A few more steps through the entrance hall and then a strange, dull sound as the sliding door opens into our living room. The bedroom is across the entrance to the left. I'm there, waiting in my short nightgown, listening so I can't breathe. But I hear in vain. No sounds, no movement. He's probably asleep. It is typical of him. He has not seen the bed yet and is already asleep. It is him...

Am I going? Am I not going? I don't know. And suddenly, I hear the familiar dull sound of the sliding door and the sound of bare feet on seventeen steps. Another door slammed behind the landing, and a few stepped toes on the floating floor across the living room straight to his bed. It's only a single bed, but when my cold feet slip next to him under the quilt, and he wakes up and moves a little towards the backrest, it's like the old days when we didn't need a double bed, because we were glad we could snuggle together.

He leans his back against the back of the bed. He is turned side ways towards me. We are lying face to face, my head on his outstretched arm and my hands around his neck. I want to kiss him, but he gives me the kiss we give to friends when we meet them after a long time. Not on the mouth, only on the cheek. But I don't accept it. I kiss him over and over again on the lips. Firstly, they are pressed. And so I repeat it again and again. Still, I wouldn't give up when I humbled myself and came here. And in the end, he resists. My tongue pierces through his half-open lips to the bottom, into his mouth. And he pulls it in so hard it hurts. A passionate kiss follows. Shallow breathing, lifting of the chest, a burst of love...

My name is Julia, and Noro is my husband. We have been married for almost thirty years and have known each other for three years longer. It's more than half of our lives. And indeed, no one imagines that we have never argued over the years. And that we never slept separately after an argument. If that were the truth, it would be a great pity because settling after a mutual exchange of views is the most beautiful thing, which adds a rare spice and the necessary spark to marriage and love. And in our marriage, it often sparked...

But this time, it looks serious. We have already been sleeping separately on the third day. To my question, "When will you come downstairs?" he only shakes his shoulders and replies that he needs to clear up his mind and put his thoughts in order. Well, so I let him clean his mind and order the thoughts. I hope it will not take him long. And I hope we can handle it. We have survived so much that I guess one quarrel, although very emotional, especially on my part, will not put us down.

And so I stand up from his single temporary refuge. Because what we're going to tell lies about being close to each other is a nice thing, but you can't sleep like that all night because we're old enough both to need our comfort. And so, in my short nightgown, I tiptoe down the stairs again and end up alone in our double bed on the first floor. I have to hold on. Somehow I guess it will improve...

CHAPTER TWO: A CHRISTMAS GIFT

From my point of view, cleaning in Noro's head takes a long time. The progress is that I go to him upstairs, but he also goes downstairs. We take turns. Although, indeed, I'm upstairs more often than he is in our bedroom downstairs. But our nightly secret meetings almost always end the same way: we make love, and then we break up. And we sleep the rest of the night separately. I worry. I don't know if he does either. Perhaps...

Even during the day, it's kind of weird. Noro comes home from work later and later. He has dinner, takes a shower, watches a movie on TV, and moves upstairs. We talk calmly. We don't argue, but our children still feel the tension between us. We haven't been like this before. Our separate sleep began at the end of October. And soon the Christmas Day will knock on the door.

"Mom, you must stop this madness! Erik and I can no longer look at you. We want both of you to calm down and wish everything was in our family as before."

"Simona, I can't manage it. I do not know what to do. It has never been so difficult to reconcile. I'm trying, but it is useless. We have to endure it. Dad definitely needs a break. Maybe from me. Who knows? That must be his decision."

"We will not wait for him to take an action! We want to buy you a Christmas stay. Choose where you want to go. Erik and I will pay for it. And let it be before Christmas. We want to have a peaceful holiday."

"So reserve us a stay in Kosice. In recent years we have been going to the IMT Smile concert there. It's always been exceptional."

"December 17th. The Christmas concert. Kosice. Their last concert of this year. Is it acceptable by you?" My daughter asks me after searching the Internet for a while.

"And isn't it a little weird to get a Christmas present so soon before Christmas?"

"No, it isn't! What is happening here is strange and weird! I'll look at the accommodation somewhere near the O2 Arena, and you will go. We don't care if you want to or not. Christmas gifts are not to be refused."

In a moment, our children are sitting together in the room. I hear them rejoicing that they booked a room via the Internet for us. They're on the phone. The reservation was first confirmed to them but then canceled. They found other accommodation. They want to make sure no one will cancel it again. Yes. And that's it!

It is clear. Although I keep saying that my children didn't inherit anything from me, there is something. They are stubborn. And very persistent. All three of them. Like me, they go for it through the corpses when they decide on something.

"So, you can get ready! On December 17th and 18th, you sleep in Kosice. We have booked accommodation in a hotel near the concert hall. Also with a parking place. And the concert tickets. We hope you will come back calm and we will have a nice Christmas together. This will be the biggest Christmas present for us. So you have the present which is called two in one!"

"Awesome!"

Great kids. They came up with this very well. They want to give a gift to us, but also to themselves! Probably they don't have an easy life either with us.

"Our children bought us concert tickets and paid for hotel accommodation. In Kosice. As a Christmas present." I am telling Noro as we are lying side by side in our bedroom downstairs. For the last two nights, we each slept alone. I was waiting for him, but he didn't come. So, I said to myself that I wouldn't be the only person to humiliate myself. It's his turn now. And so he appeared the third night.

"Simona has already told me. I do not know if that's a good idea!"

"And why not? They are trying to make us work as a normal family again. We should appreciate it! Or is it hard for you to spend two nights in a hotel with me?"

"Of course not. Why? All right, we can go. "

We are sitting in the car on the way to Kosice. My husband has an envelope that contains our common Christmas present from the children. Two tickets to the concert of our favorite music group, accommodation for two nights in a hotel, including parking, even cash is enclosed in the envelope. It says: "For the journey and a nice dinner." So that's how our two kids made it up!

Our son Peter's family already lives in their own house, so they are protected from our marital crisis.

Since Noro and I behave politely to each other during the day, our eldest son has no idea about our problems. Only Simona and Erik experience them with us. And they decided to change our life, and thus theirs, with their Christmas present.

There is already a lot of snow in Kosice. And it's still snowing. We are accommodating quickly, and we rush to the streets. Noro knows I love snowflakes. When they fall onto my face, I stretch out both my hands towards them like a small child, and I enjoy every touch of them. Although their lives on my palms are too short, I offer them the warmth of my palms over and over again. I don't wear gloves, and I don't like hats. I'm looking forward to my hair turning snow. When my hair is full of snowflakes. And they last for the longest, not only on my hair but also on my eyelashes. Then I don't breathe or blink; I just enjoy that particular moment. And I wish it lasted forever. Because I know that beautiful moments are fleeting. Just like us. They only stay for a moment. Like our life...

Christmas and snow. It's like a fulfilled Christmas dream. I don't know what more I could wish for! I love Kosice. Everything is different there. We walk around the square with stalls with Christmas goodies, but we don't stop there for long. We take a glass of hot punch and hurry up for that nice dinner. We are holding hands as always. Looking at us, no one would realize that we are experiencing a marital crisis. I don't believe it either. The atmosphere of Kosice city and the joy of the snow gives me a chance to forget about everything wrong. The world around is beautiful.

We are sitting together in an exciting restaurant, where our familiar acquaintance invited us. Actually, she's my ex-student. She divorced, resigned from her lucrative job, and started a new life. She returned to Kosice, where she once studied at university because Kosice grew to her heart. Just like everyone's who visits the city once.

And so we have not only a delicious dinner but also an enjoyable meeting full of memories and laughter. Our friend has no idea what's going on with our lives. Actually, I don't know either. Only Noro knows...

The concert of our favorite band was also kind of weird. Not really! The show was great like always. Only Noro behaved strangely. He suddenly got up from his seat during the song, stood in the aisle, and was singing aloud and dancing! I felt like I was not with him. For years, we got up from seats together, we were swinging together as we held hands, or he grabbed me around the waist, we were singing together. And now? He didn't even notice if I was there or not. He didn't care. He did not need me, just himself.

Walking back to the hotel, we held hands and talked about the performance, but nothing was personal in the conversation. I felt it was all wrong.

Our night after the concert deserves the same rating. We were lying on a double bed, but we didn't act as a married couple. Before, we had looked forward to every night at the hotel because we had constantly made love. We finally had had time just for ourselves, we had thrown all our worries behind our heads, and we had been full of the desire to lie in each other's arms after pleasant moments. When it hadn't worked out at home, and we had had a quarrelsome time, we had always gone somewhere together so we could have experienced a beautiful night at the hotel. That night had convinced us repeatedly that despite the problems and worries, we still loved each other.

And now we shared a double bed, but it was kind of too big for us. We each lay huddled together. Noro was asleep, and I... Tears were rolling down my face and running down my cheeks to my mouth. I felt the taste of the saltwater, and it made me cry more and more... All the wrong...

We spent the next day in the city which I like so much. We were walking side by side, holding hands. As usual. There was snow all around, even though no more snowflakes were falling. We walked along the beautifully decorated square, but no festive feeling of peace and tranquility came. Chaos reigned in my soul, and my heart was full of sorrow. And that sadness didn't want to leave it, even when we were sitting next to each other in the beautifully decorated St. Elizabeth's Cathedral, and I kept saying to myself, "Lord God, please help me. Save our marriage! I beg you very much!"

The mission organized for us by our children did not serve its purpose. We came back together, but we were even more lonely than before.

"So how?" Simona welcomed me asking a question with a hidden smile while Dad was unloading things from the car, and there were only the two of us in the room.

"As before. Everything is as usual. No change. All the wrong!"

The disappointment was reflected in her eyes. I knew I had let her down. In fact, we both disappointed her and her brother. Both their father and their mother. All the wrong!

After the four of us had had dinner together, Noro didn't even watch the movie. He was exhausted and went to bed upstairs.

He didn't come to see me that night. And I didn't go either. I did not have the strength to fight the odds: on one side of the battlefield stood me, a woman who was destroyed and infinitely lonely, and on the other side was my husband, his uncleared mind, and his statements and behavior that hurt me painfully. I wanted to fall asleep, wake up in the morning to a whole new day, and find that none of what I was going through was true. That it was just a nightmare that would fade as soon as I open my eyes. Or not?

Probably not...

My uncertainty was resolved the next night. He came. We were lying side by side on my part of the double bed, and I whispered: "I love you. I've always loved you. I never stopped. Despite everything we had to go through together. I never, even for a second, stopped loving you."

"Then why didn't you ever tell me? I know I've made plenty of mistakes in my life. If I could turn back time, I would do many things completely differently. But... time cannot go back. If, instead of endless remorse and banging my mistakes on my head, you would have told me at least once in a while that you loved me..."

"Yes, we've both made a bunch of mistakes, but it's never too late to start over... Unless there's someone else, you love..."

"Well, in fact, there is!" my husband said, and at that moment, the two people were lying next to each other, holding hands, without saying a word. Because of tears. Emotions overwhelmed us. And since the men do not cry, Noro got up from our bed and hurried upstairs to hide his feelings under the duvet. I didn't need to hide my grief. Women are allowed to cry. And so I cried... And it lasted the next day. I didn't want to, but the tears were just coming out of my eyes. I couldn't stop them... How could he do this to me?

"She is my high school classmate. We were dating together, and then we broke up. But she was still in the corner of my heart. All my life." Noro confesses, lying in my bed the next night, and I can't believe what he's telling me.

"So, why did you marry me? When you didn't love me?"

"I loved you. Very much."

"How could you love me when you were still keeping someone else in the corner of your heart?!"

"I don't know how it's possible, but I loved you very much. And I still loved also her."

"It's sick!"

"Yes, it probably is, but it's true."

"Was she with you when you were at the reunion meeting from which you did not return until morning? Was she there with you until four o'clock in the morning?"

"Yes, she was. But we were not alone. There were four of us left."

"Did you start dating her then?"

"No, not until soon. First, we met for coffee, talked about our lives, and gradually realized that we still felt something for each other. And then we met every time I was traveling through the city where she lived. You know the city also belonged to my region."

"That's why you were going home late from work for the last few weeks! Were you meeting her?"

"Yes, I was."

"Did you cheat on me ?!"

"What do you mean?"

"Exactly as I say. Did you sleep with her?"

The endless silence was broken by an answer I didn't want to hear. From the very beginning, as soon as we started dating, I told him that if he stopped loving me and fell in love with someone else because we do not know what can happen, I wanted him to say to me first. And only then he would sleep with her. I would try to understand him but didn't want to be like the poor women cheated on by their men. I would forgive him for everything in the world, but not for infidelity. He knew it from the beginning. So why did he want to tell me something I didn't want to hear?

"Once."

"So you made me that poor thing! Couldn't you tell me first that you had anyone else? Couldn't you break up with me? Did you have to sleep with her first and make me the poor thing?"

"I did not plan to do it. It just happened."

"And when? When did you go to the street market fair? No concert tickets? No classmates? Oh, I'm sorry, just one classmate. Actually, that...!"

"Don't call her that!"

"Not? And how shall I call a married woman who has a husband and children, has a family, and sleeps peacefully with a married man who also has a wife and children? I never want to hear her name!"

"I am sorry. I know I have let you down, but I can't help it. I like you very much, but I don't love you as much as I used to. I love her! Please, forgive me!"

"Maybe I'll forgive you someday. I do not know. It hurts terribly now. I'm hurt and quite confused. All I want is for me not to wake up in the morning. I want to die!"

"Don't say nonsense! We can handle it somehow."

"Can I ask you for something? Let's not tell our kids about it until after Christmas. Let's not spoil the holidays for them."

"Of course, you don't have to ask me for it at all!"

A man who was still my husband but already belonged to another strange woman, whom he carried in his heart all his life, left my room for his, upstairs. He didn't have to clean his mind anymore. It seemed that it had already been completed.

It was my turn now. Good thing it was Christmas. At least I didn't have to pretend in front of my students. Because the most challenging part of everything is when people want to be happy and spread joy and positive energy around them, and at the same time, their heart is bleeding. But who cares that I have problems? After all, students don't go to school to look at my torn face and teary eyes. They want to study and acquire not only knowledge but also to enjoy a pleasant atmosphere.

Sometimes the teaching profession is very demanding. Although I think I'm a pretty good actress. But now I know I wouldn't handle it this time. Not even the darkest glasses could hide my weeping angora eyes. I need time to get it over. Definitely, I can do it. But not now. Thank God it's Christmas. My secondary grammar school students mustn't and won't see me like that! I'm completely down. I will have to try hard to hide it from my children over the holidays. I will do my best to enjoy the peaceful holidays. I'm strong enough... I am able to do it... I have to... I have no choice... And then I'll clean up... In my head...

"I like you, but I do not love you as much as I used to!"

The endless echo of that incredible sentence, as well as the events of the last two days, did not allow me to sleep. What happened to us? What will happen next?

The following evening, I went into the bathtub shortly before bedtime. It's my favorite place when I'm having a hard day, and I need to turn off myself. Hot bath, massage jets, scented candles. Balm for my sore soul.

However, the comfort is not given to me. I hear Erik talking to Noro in the living room. And this time, not Noro, but our son raises his voice...

In a while, the bathroom door opens, and my husband is standing there. He has a surprised, reproachful facial expression.

"Did you tell them? After all, we agreed to let them know after the holidays!"

"No, I didn't tell anyone! Why are you shouting at each other? Wait, I'll get out of the bath and work it out. Don't argue. We don't need that at all right now. Nobody!"

"Come here and sit down with me. I want to tell you something." my husband tells our two children, pointing to the couch.

Simona sits down next to Dad, and Erik sits on a stool opposite them while I'm in the kitchen, where I went for a drink of water because I felt really thirsty after hot water in the bathtub.

"Your mother and I want to tell you that we have agreed..." and my husband does not continue, his voice broke at the words. He is crying... I am entering the living room to help him complete his sentence:

"We agreed to split up. Dad fell in love with another woman. And he wants to start a new life with her. We should try to understand him and let him be happy." I am saying strange, unbelievable things, and I am trying my best not to cry. We can't all cry after all. I have to be strong...

"I knew he had someone! We talked to Sim about when we noticed that he was still texting someone. We just didn't want to bother you. We didn't understand that we all saw it, only you didn't notice anything!" My son turns to me with remorse in his voice.

"I did notice, honey, I'm not blind, but I didn't believe it could happen to us. I hoped it would pass. But... he says it's serious. So let him arrange his life according to him. Let's give him freedom..."

"Then let him pack his bits and pieces and get out of our house! And from our lives! We will do without him." Our son shouts with tears in his eyes. I know that sometimes we try to scream in pain, but it rarely helps. I know it. I have my experience with it.

"Don't say that Erik, this is Dad's house, too. He will be here with us as long as he wants!" I am trying to calm the situation down, and I do not know where I take the strength to say the sentences that hurt so much. I guess I'm really stronger than I thought.

Simona didn't say a word, just rose quietly from the couch and went to her room. There she crawled under the quilt, turned on her belly, and cried heartily. It could be heard all the way down. Noro wanted to go to her, but I told him to give her some time to recover. She loved her father more than her mom. She was still at the age when Dad was the center of her universe. So it was infinitely difficult to come to terms with the fact that he could disappoint her so much that she could lose him because of a strange woman. It took time to cope with it. And her father had to give the time to her.