

Pero Kvesić

Combination Of Circumstances

Translated from Croatian by Andrea Pisac

That night I was remembering mainly crucial moments, again and again, and they were randomly interrupted by those less important, some of them were constantly coming back, others would just wash over me, some would take a form of a small detail, a word or a motion, others would open like a baroque creation of inexhaustible details, first one wouldn't have time to take shape because they would soon be followed by the next lot which stayed a long time, like a heavy frozen picture. But they all hurt.

We were sitting opposite each other, there was a coffee table with glasses and an ashtray between us. Contrary to my habit and taste, I was drinking brandy. I wasn't enjoying it, but it was good for me; every swig burnt my throat and stomach and at least temporarily they managed to numb down the sharpness of the draining sight of Taliya - so close but so unattainable.

What did I tell her? What did she tell me? What was it we told each other? In which other, which word asked for the next? I am not sure of anything any more because I was straining myself so much to talk and listen to her that I didn't have any strength left for remembering. Thoughts and feelings were so strong that for some sentences I am not sure if I uttered them or not, if she actually said anything or I believed in that while she was saying something else. But one thing I was positive about - she didn't say a single word I waited for, wanted or tried to get out of her.

We split two months ago. The motive was insignificant, I already forgot it. At one moment, no more special than the three years we spent together, everything was fine, and then a second later she was simply collecting her stuff around my flat, putting them in a big plastic bag, and I was far from trying to stop her. After that I didn't see her for a few weeks, and then we started seeing each other again. First time it was by accident, and the second time as well, but the third time it was clear that we both contributed to the accidental meeting. Later, she rang me with some strange excuse that we have to see each other. Then I rang her. All in all, we saw each other every few days. And we talked. At two occasions, those meetings grew into a night spent together in each other's arms until the morning.

Every time I saw her I was torn apart. With every chance I tried to explain all those things I didn't in the past three years, every time in a different way, after which I would wait eagerly to see some results,

to feel things between us and inside us get better. Every time I heard she wanted to see me again, I was on fire: she realized, recognized that I was right, she got rid of what I couldn't reconcile with... And when we would meet - disappointment. Nothing. As if we didn't exchange a single word the time before. In the first moments every time we saw each other, that would be a bitter pill which would set my mood for the day. I knew I was losing her more and more that way: on one side she had a boyfriend, someone who was trying to be fun, nice and witty for her, to please her as much as possible; on the other she would meet me, miserable, bitter, dark and heavy, unbearable for himself as well. I would need to recover from our meetings in the following days, and when I was feeling fine again, we would see each other again; we would repeat everything, which only made us drift apart further. My almost routine question the moment I saw her was: "Have you given any thoughts to what we talked about last time?" She would reply short. "Nothing". That word would fall into my stomach like a leaden ball. Is it possible that she doesn't care about things I say? Why does she want to see me again, as if she expects something? If only I could sense what it is she wants. Why doesn't she tell me clearly what she wants from me? Or maybe, relaxed and happy with her new relationship, she just enjoys meeting me occasionally, crushing me like a butterfly underneath her thumb, collecting the debt for everything she resented me for when we were together, when she couldn't take it out?

We were apart once before, in summer two years ago, after a year of being together. I told her we weren't suited for each other, that our relationship was not satisfying, that we were both losing by being together, I had loads of arguments to back that up. Again, the motive was insignificant, the final good-bye without dramatic scenes. I made up my mind - it would be easiest if the break-up is drastic: best is not to see each other at all, not to think of her, avoid mutual friends, avoid talking if we run into each other, rip her out of my heart... So I behaved accordingly.

She rang me in the middle of the night saying she felt sick, she had toothache, she needed those strong American painkillers she left in my flat, could I bring them to her.

I went to see her. I made her take the pills. She was crying, talking, throwing herself over me, but I was tough, as a rock. I broke free from her arms around my neck, I pushed her off my chest; I waited until the pills started kicking in. If they hadn't I would have taken her to emergency room. She was sick from excitement, screaming I was a monster if I can look at her like that and stay so cold, as if I was taking pleasure in her suffering. I didn't want to help her - no matter how difficult it was for me - caress her until she calms down, let alone to make up with her. I was disgusting. I didn't even smile, I didn't say anything kind. I thought - it was for the best. For me and for her. When she sees how despicable I am -

she will cool off. She will hate me. And it's better to hate someone you don't live with than to live with someone you don't love. And when she cools off, and starts hating me, it will be easier for me to cure myself from her.

A few days later, we had a similar scene, I endured that as well. But the third time I didn't. She told me afterwards: "I couldn't even imagine you're so disgusting!" Remembering those moments was a big shake-up for our relationship after we went back together. Often she would sweet talk me Mr. Disgusting.

I have to admit I didn't expect the break-up to take such a toll on her. I believed she would find solace in numerous guys who were stalking her all the time. Some of them managed to occupy her attention for a day or two, but she would always come back to me humbly, and I would pretend not to notice anything. But it was exactly that period of being apart for a long time, which threatened to stay like this, the time in which we desperately wanted each other, that showed there was something more meaningful between us than just a few evenings of fun. Though, I suspected sometimes she wanted to get together because of her hurt pride, never was she dumped by anyone before, she was the one who controlled when the relationship would start, how it would develop and when it would end. It occurred to me that it shouldn't come as a surprise if her vanity suddenly gets better when things improve between us - I forget about the rough patch, relax and completely surrender to her - but only so she could leave me this time. I made jokes about it, but it took time for the thought to leave my head - especially that half which is true in each joke.