

The Anniversary Present

by:

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Darkness. A candle is burning on the table. Light.

Today's a lovely day. Today's a very lovely day ...

Happily, he arranges the table and sets some puppets on the stage.

Ding-dong. *[imitates the sound of the doorbell.]*

He puts a puppet on the table and starts mending it.

Hi darling! I've missed you ... a lot ... yes... every moment you were away. I was waiting for this night to come, and you, through that same door. The very moment that everything would turn bright. Everything would shine under the light of your golden hair. You know ... when you're not here, it's as if everything is gloomy. I see nothing. When you're not here, it is as if I'm left alone in a dark cave. Everywhere is black. But everything illuminates when you appear. You shine like the sun. You are my sun ... shine on me ... shine ... what delicate warmth ... I love it. Today is a lovely day ... Today's a very lovely day ...

The man wraps the puppet in a paper.

Ding-dong. *[imitates the sound of the doorbell.]*

Now you will open the door and come in. You see me standing by the table with a wonderful gift beside me. You stand at the doorway and stare at me. Now and again, your long eyelashes curtain your eyes slowly and hide them from mine. And this is how your eyes seduce mine.

After a while, he stops wrapping the puppet in the paper, unfolds it and puts it within her sight. Light.

[to the puppet] It will be better if she sees you first. It will be more lovely... Why don't you ring the bell? You should be here by now ... Ding-Dong *[imitates the sound of the doorbell.]* . You must be at the stairs now ... I'll count to three: one ... two ...

Darkness.

Light. Man and the puppet on the stage. Some puppets of the previous scene are absent.

Today's a lovely day. Today's a very lovely day. Today we are going to celebrate our anniversary as we do every year.

Ding-dong. *[imitates the sound of the doorbell.]*

Hi darling. I've missed you; a lot ... I've set the table; nice, isn't it? I wanted to listen to some pleasant music ... Chopin ... dear Chopin ... the poet of the piano ... oh no ... take it easy ... I know you don't like Chopin ... ok! ... Forget it. I don't want whatever you don't. That is called *mutual understanding*. One has to overlook some of his or her favorites. I've forgotten Chopin. What about you?

It's late ... too late ... you're still not here...

Ding-dong. *[he imitates the sound of the doorbell.]*

Hi darling. I've missed you; a lot ... I've prepared our dinner. And set the table; nice, isn't it? I knew you'd appreciate it. The way you look says that. It reminds me of my mother. When I was a child, my father whispered some words - I don't know what words - in my mother's ear. She gazed at him - in the way you're doing now. I never understood what he said, but whatever it was, my mother loved it. Once I did catch the words. We were at a grand celebration party. It was a great hall, luxurious, full of people, I remember. Men and women were busy dancing together; as they do in films: marvelous and impressive. I've been to a party like that since. I don't know which colonel or general had thrown the party. Whoever he was, he was a man of greatness. Then too, my father came and murmured something in my mother's ear. She stared at him- in the way you're doing now. She hesitated for a moment. Then she got up and began dancing with him. Now you are looking at me in the same way... my darling ... will you come to have a dance with me 'til the meal is ready? *[he dances]* My father danced very well. My mother not being able to dance as well as he did, stood aside to see how people appreciated him. And she appreciated him as well. My father was a strong man ... yes ... he was indeed. Unfortunately, I'm not as skillful as he was ... heh ... you see, our feet are not in harmony ... yes ... a difficult task ... we have to practice ... I know I'm not able to dance well but ... Actually, I've never had lessons. And it was never that important for me to learn it from my father. Puppets were the only things I cared for. Look at these puppet chessmen. They're from my childhood. I made them myself, and have always played with them. It was with these same chessmen that I learned to play chess. Nice, isn't it? ... I love them ... hey, something is bothering you, isn't it? ... Why on earth? ... Ok! ... Ok! ... I'll say not a

single word ... nothing ... just stop fighting, ok? ... Be kind to me now that we're together ...

Let's stop fighting ... forever, let's stop fighting...

Ding-dong. [*imitates the sound of the doorbell.*]

Hi darling. I've missed you; a lot ... I know you are extremely tired ... I wish I could play the piano. Then I would play your weariness away. But I've never touched a single piano key ... Yes, you are right. Instead of playing the piano, I should sit close to you ... I know ... I'll neither call anybody nor play with the puppets ... just be close to you ... so shall we stop fighting? ...

Forever, we'll stop fighting...

Darkness.

*Light. Lonely man and the puppet on the stage.
Some puppets of the previous scene are absent.
The puppet on the stage is changed a bit.*

Ding-dong. *[he imitates the sound of the doorbell.]*

Hi darling. I've missed you; a lot ...

Today's a lovely day. Today's a very lovely day. We've stopped fighting. We're going to stop fighting ... forever.

Today we are going to celebrate our wedding anniversary. As always on same day, I've set the table. Nice, isn't it?

I'm listening to Chopin ... Chopin ... dear Chopin ... the poet of the piano ... I think it's good music even if you don't like it. Tonight is the perfect opportunity for us to talk to one another. You see, everything's spick and span: the table is set and the meal is ready. So I have the right to talk ... don't worry, we fight no more; nor will our wedding anniversary be spoiled. We're going to stop fighting ... we're going to stop fighting forever...

[he plays a recording of Chopin or he hear one of his music in his mind] Ah Chopin! I love it. You don't like it, do you? I believe it was Chopin that caused our first fight. Why don't you like Chopin? You used to like him. As I remember, we first met each other at Chopin's Piano Concerto. It was that very day that I held your hand. When, in the cab, before getting to the hall, we met each other quite accidentally. You reached toward the driver to pay him, but I stopped your hand. It was the first time that I felt the delicate warmth of your sweet hand.

- Let me charge it.
- No, I'll pay it.

Then gentlemanly I did pay the driver, though I didn't have much money with me. The driver had understood what was going on between us and took advantage of the situation by shortchanging me. But I didn't complain. Do you remember the puppet I gave you that day, the tiny puppet that I made myself? ... Hmm...lovely days and nights ... you kept putting your head on my shoulder and I stared into your eyes amorously. We were the envy of everyone. Later on, I wished we could come back to those days; the days we helped each other; the days we didn't annoy each other; the days without any fighting ... Just like now that we have stopped fighting...

But it took a long time to get to where we are now. Does it mean that we did our best to return to the first step?!

All these years I wished you didn't exist. That you didn't exist so I could devote a day, a night, an hour, even a single minute to myself; so that I could play chess; with the same chessmen that I made. You hated those puppets and the fellows with whom I played. Always. And I didn't understand the reason behind it. Never. Just as we began playing, your head began aching. And then your back began aching. And then you asked for your pills. And then we had to take you to a clinic and so on. Now I know there was never anything wrong with you, all that time. Nothing. Even the day you lost your consciousness in the cab and as soon as you recovered, you began cursing me and my fellow and Chopin and chess and puppets. Embarrassed, I lowered my eyes in order to escape other passengers' glances. And I kept quiet. Absolutely quiet. And I thought it would be so nice if you fell dead. Yes, you dead. I wished you were dead so that I didn't have to hear you. So that I didn't have to see your furious face with your mouth opened like a roaring bear. I wished you were dead so that we could stop fighting; to stop fighting forever.

Once I confided in you- that I wished you were dead. I whispered; you cried. Continually. About three hours without stopping once. And I had kept quiet. Absolutely quiet. I was busy considering my own fantasy.

God is all-merciful. He fulfills His servants' needs.

Now we stop fighting ... we stop fighting forever ...

Darkness.

Light. Lonely man and the puppet on the stage. The puppet is changed a bit. There's no other puppet.

Today's a lovely day. Today is a very lovely day. Today we are going to celebrate our wedding anniversary as we do every year. I've set the table. Nice, isn't it?

Ding-dong. [he imitates the sound of the doorbell.]

It is said that the souls of men are able to fly into our dreams. Is it true? You've always believed in superstition. Deep faith makes the unreal, real. Now, is it possible for you to fly into my dream? ... So ...

Hi darling! I've missed you; a lot ... every moment you were gone. I would let you into my dreams if you promised not to pick a fight. Even a short cry would wake me up, I swear. I still swear by your soul, I'll never sleep again if you insist on fighting in my dream. I'll stay awake to keep from fighting ... to stop fighting forever ... just like now that we have stopped fighting ... We stop fighting forever ... You see how lovely it is! How sweet! If I knew that your death would bring the world some peace, I would do it sooner. Now, you are no longer able to fight. You do not exist. It is *my* intention that you don't exist. Instead, look how everything is in order: the clothes, the rooms, the table. Even the puppet chessmen are at the corner of the table. You see how well-favored they are! I have also prepared the meal tonight; with my own hands. I'm going to devour it, too. There is no one here to annoy me. Do you remember last night that how suddenly you began embittering the dinner? Just for the presence of my childhood fellow - with whom I played chess with those puppet chessmen. It had been a long time since we played our last game. Maybe it was because of your constant fights that I couldn't checkmate him. At that time, I was the prescribed loser. He didn't play with me any more. He got bored. You had made a loser out of me.

Forget it. Yesterday, that fellow came to me after a long time of separation. He was in need. In great need. I remember the days when he offered me a shelter and I poured out my heart to him. It was a good opportunity to compensate all he had done for me. I accompanied him.

Your damned questions started as soon as I came home: where did you go? When did you leave? Why did you...? What ...? Who ...? ...

When my mother was alive she was the same way. So sensitive she was about me. She bombarded me with different kinds of questions: where did you go? When did you leave? Why did you ...? What ...? Who ...? ...

Yes. She desired my company. She fainted too; Heart-attacks also; ... She constantly followed me around. That's why I have always lived with my

mother beside me. I feel her. And consequently, all the women with whom I've had any kind of relationship have deserted me. Because when I kissed them, anxiety glistened in my eyes. I always expected my mother to emerge from among the trees. You know, she always wanted me beside her but I rejected her company. It's a long time since I haven't rejected anyone's lap. I can't any more indeed. I wish I could still escape from home or as I did sometimes from school. I *need* to escape so that I can be my own. I *need* to be alone so that I can devote sometime, even a moment, to myself. Absolutely to myself. Just a bit of solitude. But you were a ... a barrier ... yes ... you skillfully filled in for her and played her role. And it was you who cross-questioned me. And you didn't know how it would make me hate you. I resent you to the extent that I long for your death.

Yesterday, for instance. When you started giving me the third degree over dinner, I remembered my mother and also my fantasy. But I still was not tempted to carry it out. And when you finished with your questions - the ones about that childhood fellow - you went about swearing at me, at him, at Chopin, at the puppet chessmen and puppets. It was the very moment that I loved to have my childhood playfellow beside me. I needed his shoulders to cry on. And I did cry and cry to death when he offered me some. And he, in return, fondled me just in a way as real mothers do. And asked me to treat you, my wife, my love, with more affection. In fact, he always did it but you always ignored him. You had neglected that he was a kind fellow of yours too.

You were still pursuing your own business - scolding. And I was busy considering my own grand wish in silence.

All of a sudden, I shouted, though in a low voice, 'I will kill you'.

Anyhow, I wasn't really going to carry it out since there was no justifiable reason in my mind to support the action. Besides, you knew well that I was not so determined to commit it but you made a fuss out of the case.

'Come on ... what are you waiting for? ... Come and kill me ... come on'.

And you swore; at me, at him, at Chopin, at the puppet chessmen and puppets. But this time the words were more indecent! And I still didn't have enough reason to support my grand wish to be carried out.

'Come on ... what are you looking at? ... Do it ... come and kill me ... I'm waiting ... come on'.

You threw my in my face. I'm not a man of his word, I knew. I have always been incapable before you.

You, taking advantage of the opportunity, carried on with your screams and knocked the whole chessmen off the table. Some of them cracked. And you

broke those which had not been cracked yet. I was choked with anger, concealing my tears. As I remember I was just thinking to my grand wish.

‘What’s it? What’s wrong with you? Has anyone violated your childish world? Do your worst then. Come on...’

I was just thinking when I could fulfil my grand wish to stop fighting ... to stop fighting forever.

‘You see ... you don’t have the guts to do what you have once exclaimed ... you can’t even repeat your words. You’d better still play with your puppets’.

‘Shut up’, I said to myself. And then I cried out, ‘but I have made puppets for you, too; for our wedding anniversary...’

it was from now on - I don’t know why - that everything seemed obscure in appearance and slow in movement. It was as if time had been dragged. Then I witnessed *my* puppet, *your* puppet, the puppet of *our* wedding anniversary, fly too high in the air, circle round for sometime and then come down to the floor with its lap flapping. Just like one’s golden hairs in the wind. I saw it, the puppet. Coming closer and closer. It just passed the edge of the table, traversed the length of the legs and hit the ground. It nearly took along time for the puppet to cover the whole course. On its way from ceiling to the ground, lots of my other puppets jumped out of the present of the anniversary: the puppet chessmen, my childhood puppets, the puppet I gave you on our first meeting day, and even the very puppet of our wedding anniversary that I dedicated to you. It seemed as if they wanted to rescue themselves. The present of our wedding anniversary hit the ground. A sharp sound, I heard. I had made the puppet of clothes and wood, but I don’t know why when it crashed to the floor I heard a kind of glass-shattering sound. It broke into pieces.

It was no longer necessary to mind any reason. My grand wish had occupied the opposite scenery. Time had been shortened. As short as possible. As a dot. Transparent my fantasy was; My hands on your throat. They had made parallel, dark-blue lines on your colourless neck.

My grand wish had come true.

We stop fighting ... We stop fighting forever.

Darkness.

Light. Lonely man on the stage. The fragments of the puppet on the stage.

Today's a lovely day. Today's a very lovely day. Today we are going to celebrate our wedding anniversary.

Ding-dong. [he imitates the sound of the doorbell.]

Now the bell rings and you come in. Then I tell you, 'Hi darling! I've missed you; a lot ... every moment you were gone.

Last night I didn't sleep well. No ... I didn't dream about you. It's a long time I've never dreamt about you. But you were present in my last night dream. It was our wedding anniversary and I had prepared a big meal. How delicious it was! How amazing was my appetite! With the picture of my face in front, that was chewing. I didn't pay any attention to the taste. I was just looking at the opposite side. The picture went down, or rather farther. I caught sight of the hands rising upward, coming downward. The food is brought up and is taken into the darkness of the mouth. I did the same exactly like lorries which are unloaded at night. The picture went further. I was eating but my hands didn't reach my mouth. They were playing piano. I was playing piano ... Chopin ... dear Chopin. The puppets - *my* puppets - were dancing on the table: the puppet chessmen, my childhood puppets, the puppet I gave you on our first meeting day, and even the very puppet of our wedding anniversary. They danced in harmony with my fingers dancing on the keys. I looked at the piano. It wasn't a piano. I was a table; the table I had set for dinner. This piano had no keys. The keys were the bones of your fingers on which I was pressing my own fingers. The bones whose flesh had been cut off after your boiling in the pot. These keys were not as poetic as Chopin. Rather, there was a kind of wilderness in them which sounded like your screams. I was awakened by those screams. I decided to tell you about my dream but I told to myself, 'no, not now. Let's leave it to the end of the task.'

Now that in our wedding anniversary I'm telling you the dream I'm thinking that how it is possible to dream the task I was going to undertake today in detail. Last night, for example one of the bones of your finger got caught of my tooth and broke it. Up to here I saw and remembered. Even in my dream you bother me. In the morning, I was considering the reason that why I should have such a dream. I loved you, and I wanted to live and enjoy with eachother. But what happened? My puppet chessmen were cracked; the puppet of our wedding anniversary broke into pieces; my childhood fellow deserted me; all my love memories died; and at the end, Chopin's poetic music metamorphosised into the screams of a bony piano. Now I think I had

the right to have that dream. You had swallowed all those memorable past. And when I grabbed your throat, you didn't bring them up. So I devoured you to preserve that memorable past. Maybe it is for the same reason that when we come across a dumpy, lovely little girl, we are tempted to devour her or to bite her. Well, I loved you too; a lot ... so I devoured you. I had a romantic meal. Now I'm sure that we stop fighting at dinner-time; we stop fighting at lunch-time; we stop fighting at anytime ... we stop fighting forever ...

something gets caught between his teeth.

Everything it was, it cracked. But my tooth cracked, too. No problem. Let's not spoil tonight's anniversary. Let's not remember the past; the bitter past. Because we're going to stop fighting.

Ding-dong. *[he imitates the sound of the doorbell.]*

We stop fighting ... we stop fighting forever ...

The real sound of the doorbell as the man imitated till now.

Amazement. Silence. Darkness.

Seyed Afshin Hashemi

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