Alma

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Alma woke up some mornings with the thought that she had forgotten something. Not someone's name, not an important appointment. Something that, if she remembered it, might put everything in its place. She opened her eyes and stayed like that for a while. This house had not yet found its own voice. In the mornings, the sound of Alma's footsteps on the floor was unfamiliar, the light fell differently through the windows, and at night, if she startled awake, it took a few seconds to remember where she was. Most of the boxes were still unpacked. The orange sofa, however, had taken its place in the middle of the room since the very first day; as if it were the only thing Alma had no doubts about. She got up and sat on it. The house still smelled of paint, wood, and cardboard. It didn’t smell like anyone.

Perhaps that was why her mind drifted back to Arman. Finding this house without him hadn't been that simple. In those days, Alma had no patience for anything; not for seeing houses, not for talking, not for making decisions. Alireza, however, was persistent. Wherever he could help, he did, without waiting for Alma to ask. The house was finally found. Alma's house. Arman had only helped to find it, to get things moving, to make something that seemed far too big for Alma in those days a little more bearable. Perhaps this was what reminded her again of how much she had gotten used to his presence.

Arman had been her husband for years, and now he wasn't. But some habits don't leave when people do. In the number that hadn't been deleted yet. In asking about her mother's well-being. In the things he had heard once and still remembered. In the fact that if he could do something, he sometimes did it quietly. People don't always end with their departure. Sometimes, only the .shape of their presence changes. And maybe that was even harder

For Alma, Arman wasn't just someone her heart was still tied to. He had become a part of her daily life; one of those parts whose weight you don't realize until they're gone. He had become so comfortable with Alma's family that sometimes she herself was surprised to see it. If there was something he could help with, he just did it. Sometimes Alma thought that people really don't end when they leave. Sometimes just the form of their presence shifts. And Arman was still there, in a .way Alma herself didn't know what to do with

The most important thing was that she still mattered to him. She couldn't diminish this fact with any reasoning. Even on the days she was angry with him. Even when she wanted to hear nothing from him for days. Even when she thought she couldn't stand hearing those same words one more time. Still, something inside her turned back toward him. And sometimes this made her sad. Because if there were nothing left between them, everything would be simpler. She could pack up the past, lock the door, and throw the key somewhere she'd never find it again. But you .can't treat something that still matters to you like that

Arman had always been a little too close to life for Alma. Not just because of the years they had spent together. He moved faster than Alma in many things. He made decisions faster, warmed up to people faster, figured out what he wanted faster, and then, with that same certainty, he would take Alma's hand and pull her along with him. Sometimes Alma went along. Sometimes not. That was exactly where the problem started. Arman never thought he was taking something away from her. Most of the time, he imagined he was giving her something; a path, courage, an opportunity to move forward from where she stood. And Alma knew his intentions were never .bad. Perhaps that was what made it harder to be angry

If the person in front of you intentionally hurt you, anger has a simpler form. But when you know someone and you know that a part of what exhausted you came from the same affection that was once sweet to you, you no longer know what exactly you should be angry at. At him? At yourself? Or at that moment when helping, without either of you realizing it, had slowly turned into pulling? It had taken Alma years to find a name for this feeling. It wasn't that Arman wanted to mold her into himself. It was just that sometimes he was so sure that the way he knew was the better way, .that he forgot Alma might not be meant to take that same path at all

He lived through things effortlessly that took time for Alma. And perhaps he wanted so badly for Alma to go through life more easily that he didn't see how this very effort sometimes choked her. A few nights ago, they had talked about all this again. This time, Arman had tried less than ever to prove anything. He had said that perhaps back then he thought if Alma saw some things differently, she would feel better. He said he understood now that you can't always decide for the person you love what makes them feel better.

Then he had paused. He had said that if there were to be another chance between them, he didn't want to be the same person who constantly reached out and pulled Alma in the direction he thought was right. He wanted to learn to sometimes just be beside her. Alma hadn't answered much that night. She had just looked at him. Arman's words weren't beautiful. They weren't the kind of sentences you could easily memorize later. Perhaps that was why they seemed more believable. Alma was still afraid. Once you've been frightened, you don't just calm down by hearing a few sentences. Fear, even when silent, stays somewhere inside you and listens.

But something in those words was different. Maybe not the promise itself. It was that Arman, for once, had stood still and, instead of the path he wanted to find for Alma, had looked at what had happened between them. Alma looked at the window. Sometimes she thought if love were only liking a person's good qualities, people would separate much more easily. But she didn't just love Arman when he was good. Even some of the things that had exhausted her about him were the very things she had once fallen in love with. That speed. That certainty. The way he would walk into a place, seemingly already knowing what was going to happen.

Alma was never like that. Perhaps it was this very difference that had both drawn them together and worn them out. She still didn't know how this path would end. She didn't know if she could get close to Arman again without losing herself once more somewhere amidst his desires. She didn't know how long promises lasted. But she knew one thing. She didn't want Arman to fade from her life. She didn't want a day to come when his name no longer stirred anything inside her. She barely admitted this even to herself. If they were to be together again, Alma wanted there to be room left for herself, too; for that same person who sometimes decides late, sometimes overthinks, sometimes wants to be left alone, and sometimes, for no reason, misses someone.

She didn't want to diminish herself just to stay. Just that. And maybe, for the first time, this "just" wasn't so small. Alma stood up. She looked at the room. The boxes were still there. The house was not yet complete. The curtains were slightly crooked, and a cat's paw print remained on one of the cartons. But the house was hers. This thought brought a small smile to her face. She walked over to the laptop and turned on some music. Mozart.

The sound of music echoed in the empty house. Alma spun around with gentle movements, raised her arms, and with a comical seriousness began conducting an orchestra that didn't exist. She spun again. She laughed. One of the cats watched her from beside the boxes, seemingly not understanding what was happening. Alma felt so light that for a few moments, there was nothing else in her mind. Just the music. And this house. Her own house. When the music ended, she stood right there. She exhaled slowly. The cat was messing with something on the floor, pulling it a little closer with its paws each time.

Alma watched absentmindedly at first. It was Arman's brown coat. Alma pulled it out from under the cat's paw and held it in her hand for a few moments. Then, without knowing why, she closed her eyes and slowly brought the coat to her face. She took a deep breath. Arman's smell was still the same.