



# A THREAT

U N K N O W N   E N E M Y

OLYA AMAN

# **A THREAT**

## **Unknown Enemy**

**Olya Aman**

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## Story

A shabbily dressed man kneels in the dim light of an abandoned industrial building. The light coming from the window falls on his face. Tears involuntarily fall down his cheeks. Three-day-old bristles are on his cheeks and his clothes are untidy. He looks like a homeless man, who made his way here in search of a roof over his head for the night. But something is wrong. The silhouette of one more person is seen behind him. The face is not visible because of the darkness. His hand grasps a gun, pressed to the head of the homeless man.

- “Why did you do that?” - asks the tramp through tears.

- “I had no choice,” - the executioner's voice is tired and almost devoid of emotion.

- “Animals have no choice. A human always has one.”

- “Not this time. Forgive me, but I am like an animal on sight.”

- “For what? Why? What for?” - the homeless man repeats quietly, takes a dirty handkerchief from his pocket and wipes his tears away.

- “I don't know. We have been elected.”

- “By whom?”

- “If I knew, I would find the answers to all my questions.”

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The homeless man recalls how eight years ago he was sitting with friends on a bench covered with initials.

Little kids were running around them. The sunlight was blinding, breaking through not quite blossoming leaves.

He remembers the words that he said then, as if it was yesterday:

- "Soon we will say goodbye to the school. On one hand, I want to do it, but on the other, it's scary."

The friends laugh loudly, and Eric says having caught his breath:

- "Matt, what's up with you? Do you want to stay for the second year?"

- "Matthew is right," - Benjamin intervenes. - "We do not know what awaits us. We know everything in these walls of the school, in this quiet Buffalo. It seems to us now that everything will always be like that. For example, Eric, do you plan to study after school? Have you ever thought about this?"

- "I'm going to the city. I will not stay in this God-forsaken place. I'll spin and twist and maybe something comes out there. Maybe I'll go to college."

- "So you have no clear plans. What about you, Danny?"

- "My dad said he will send me to New York as soon as I graduate from school. I'll be helping my brother. He alone feeds our family."

- "I'll stay here. Someone has to develop our native town," - Matthew laughs. - "To be honest, I do not know what I'm going to do. I'll be here for a while. I'm going to help my father in the household. Maybe I'll be lucky, and get to the airport. I do not like to build grandiose plans. I'm afraid to break away."

- "You have to set a goal and follow it. Never be afraid to start something. Especially if it is about your future."

- "Ben, you know how to cheer and inspire people to do great things."

- "Do you remember, once Ben almost married Miss Lisbon to a physical education teacher," - Danny recalls something from the past and laughs. - "You must have talent to convince her of the love for this dummy. And to tell him that she expects him to take the first step towards a serious relationship. What was at the end?"

- "They parted. Their characters did not match," - Ben smiles, - "It was impossible to foresee everything."

- "Call. It's time to go to class."

At the graduation party, they involuntarily return to this conversation again. Danny, Eric, Ben, and Matt hide behind the building near the school. They take out bottles of beer from their backpacks and are celebrating graduation.

- "Well, guys, let us drink to our graduation," - Ben toasts, - "Welcome to the big world!"

- "Farewell, childhood!" - Eric adds sadly.

Danny takes out a pack of cigarettes and lights one in silence. Ben asks:

- "Can I get one?"

- "I have only one. Let's smoke together."

"I'm leaving," - says Danny to friends taking a drag at the cigarette.

- "So fast?" - Matt asks.

- "Next week. Dad already bought me a ticket. My brother will meet me in New York."

Ben takes the cigarette, stretched out by his friend, takes a drag, releases the smoke and asks:

- "Wherever we are, let's always keep in touch. Let's not get lost and help each other as much as possible."

They get together only after 5 years, but not all of them come. A name and two dates are stamped on a strict marble monument. The inscription sparkles with fresh "gold" paint and it seems that its avaricious brilliance saying: "Danny Sanders May 27, 1987 - April 10, 2011" is causing additional tears. The participants are crying, but become distracted by the noise of the motor. Ben arrives in a rather expensive car. He's dressed sharp. Ben finds a school friend in the crowd and greets Matt. Unlike the visitor, Matt looks simple and a bit sloppy. Having thrown a handful of earth on Danny's coffin, they wait for the ceremony to end and begin to speak.

- “Matt, we have not seen each other for a long time. How are you doing?”
  - “Everything is fine. And how are you?”
  - “Everything is good. You have not changed.”
  - “And you have changed. You look great and the car is great.”
  - “Didn’t Eric come?” - Ben asks.
  - “Nobody could find him. I heard that he works somewhere in the capital.”
  - “What happened to Danny?”
  - “Accident. He fell from the roof of a skyscraper.”
  - “Damn, I still cannot believe it,” - Ben wipes away his tears.
  - “Danny and his brother were working at a construction site. His brother said everything was fine and they wanted to fly home the other day,” - Matthew's voice broke off, he continues after a pause, as if having held a council with himself. – “People say that the case was strange and could relate to drugs. But I don’t believe it. No one is insured from death. And people just want to gossip.”
- Ben suddenly embraces Matthew, not showing his tears and wiping them with his handkerchief behind his back.
- “Let’s drop in somewhere after the funeral?”

In the evening they are already sitting at the table of a small cafe.

- “Well, tell me, how are you? Have you gotten married?”
- “Honestly? Not yet. I have not met my soulmate yet,” - Matthew said. – “But I’m not complaining about life. Every day I thank God that I’m content, healthy and have a roof over my head.”
- “Yes, you’re right.”
- “What about you? You obviously work at a nice place?”
- “Yes, one big company,” - Ben replies a little nervously.
- “Which position, if it is not a secret?”
- “I carry out the instructions of the director. You know, to be honest, I'm sick of

this job.”

- “Is it a kind of the director’s assistant?”

- “Something like that...”

- “Everything is the same here. People are busy with housekeeping. Those from among the youth, who did not find a job in the airport, left. Some to Canada, others to New York.”

- "Yes, I saw. Only old people and children are here. It was not like this before.”

- “Let's drink for Danny,” - Matt drains a glass of whiskey in one gulp.

The alcohol ends quickly and Ben buys another bottle. There are a lot of different bills in his wallet.

- “Do you earn millions in the city?” –Matt asks, having seen the money.

- “To be honest, I came for you.”

- “What? For me?” - drunk Matt smiles.

- "Let's go to the city. I'll get you a job. What have you lost in this hole?”

- “Hole? So, that is how you refer to your little motherland?”

- “Having left from here, you understand what hole you've been living at all these years. Here, life flows monotonously, boringly and uninteresting. We must move.”

- “Yes, it seems that the city fuss has affected you strongly.”

- “Look at you and me! You are worthy of better than wearing hand-me-downs. Do you want to dress up in expensive shops or walk with torn pants all your life?”

- “No, no. I don’t believe it's you, Ben. The big city life has changed beyond recognition. Not only externally. I love this town. I was born and raised here. My great-grandfather, grandfather, father used to live here. Do you think I'll betray all this for the big city life? You do not know me very well.”

- “Who talks of betraying all this? You'll go, work a couple of years and get up on your feet. You’ll help your father. He is not getting younger. You’ll buy a house, get married. This is all for the future.”

- "My future is here."
- "Okay, do what you do. I'll leave you my business card. If you change your mind, call me."

After two weeks, Matt calls his friend:

- "Hello, Ben. This is Matt. How are you doing?"
- "Hi! I'm fine and you?"
- "So so... I've been sitting and thinking about life."
- "I knew you would call me."
- "You have a sad voice. Is everything ok?"
- "Yes. I have some problems at work. Never mind. Come, I'll meet you."
- "I don't want to be a burden."
- "Come on! Don't talk nonsense. Pack your stuff and don't worry about anything. You will live with me when you come."

The men meet as it was agreed on the phone. Ben and Matt are sitting in a cafe that is much more spacious than in their hometown.

- "I called one friend. In a couple of days you will go to work. It's not hard. You will be an assistant manager. They will show and explain everything to you. You will say that you came from me and all the issues will be resolved."
- "What job is it?"
- "You will know everything at the spot. They are engaged in production of dairy products."
- "And will I be immediately appointed as assistant manager?"
- "I told you, they are my acquaintances. And if in the city you have money and acquaintances, you can solve any problem. Why do we keep talking about work? Drink your coffee and let's go buy decent clothes for you. You won't wear this, will you?"
- "But I don't have money for that."
- "Did I ask if you have money? I said we'll buy you clothes." - Ben pats his



friend on the shoulder. – “Let's go.”

Everything is happening as in a dream. Matthew in a formal suit has been going to work for several days, slowly mastering the business, when a senior manager invites him to his office.

- “Matthew, how are you? Do you like this job?”

- “Thank you, sir. Everyone gets along well. The atmosphere is nice.”

- “Who is Benjamin to you?”

- “He is my friend since childhood. We were almost neighbors. We grew up together, went to school.”

- “I don't know him. I've never seen him.”

- “Really? He said that he knows the owner of this shop.”

- “It's strange, but the director doesn't know him either. But your friend seems to have very influential friends. You're lucky,” - the manager smiles.

Matt did not dare to ask his friend why he told him the lie. “I don't care what the reasons were, and what's the difference? The main thing is that I have a nice job and everything is wonderful,” - Matt is thinking to calm himself down. He prefers not to let this worry him. Moreover, he has almost no time to argue.

They visit nightclubs or bars every night. Money is not a problem. They always have enough for entertainment, alcohol, and girls.

When Matt sees the amount of his first salary on the ATM screen he rubs his eyes and counts the zeros at the end. There is no mistake. In his native town his father is hardly earning as much for half a year of hard work.

Matthew tries Dolce Vita to taste. He is more and more immersed in the luxurious city life and is spending huge sums to emulate the generous Ben. They no longer seem fantastic to him, yet he sends some of the money home. His father is able to finally pay off the mortgage and in his letters he is always sending greetings to “our savior Benjamin.”

A year later, for the unknown reasons, the senior manager is fired from the company, and Matthew is appointed to his position. His salary is significantly increased.

After a year he becomes the general director of this small enterprise. His father

bought a mansion in his name in his hometown, but Matt is not in a hurry to return. He becomes the owner of an expensive car, but he is still living with Ben in his elite spacious apartment. The area is huge, and it is easier to keep together with a fellow countryman in a megacity. At the same time, Ben never reveals the details of his work, and his friend eventually stops questioning him.

At a traditional Christmas party, Matthew, the youngest general director in the history of the company dressed up in an astonishingly expensive suit is looking around at the stylishly decorated banquet hall. Employees of the organization and members of their families are invited to the celebration: some come with wives, some, like himself, bring friends.

He gestures to stop the soft music playing in the background, feeling a little worried, pronounces a speech in front of the audience.

- “For two and a half years I have made a dizzying career, which I hardly believe myself. But for all that I have achieved, I owe to my friend Benjamin. Ben, please, can you stand up?”

His friend climbs up and looks at Matt with embarrassment while he continues.

- “This is the person who gave me another world. I felt like I got into a fairy tale that I have never believed in. I want to raise this glass for a strong and honest friendship!”

Ben puts his glass on the table and leaves abruptly. He is washing his face in the restroom, when he sees the reflection of worried Matt in the mirror.

- “Is everything ok?”

- “Yes. I felt discomfort in my stomach. I probably ate something bad.”

A few weeks later, Matt meets Nora at a cafe. The modest girl immediately captivates his heart. He is amazed that such a beauty, at the feet of which all the male population of New York should be lying, pays attention to him. Matt falls in love and tries to shower the girl with flowers, gifts, lovely surprises. They are meeting in her apartment, as she strictly refuses to come to his apartment. He introduces the girl to Ben, but he reacts to his friend’s beloved girl in surprise. Matt even wonders whether they know each other, but after a second of confusion, nothing more can be noticed and he throws the original thought out of his head.

The romance with Nora has been going on for a year. Matt is already looking for a ring for the engagement, but the crisis comes unexpectedly. The enterprise is on the verge of bankruptcy. He is charged with harboring taxes in the amount of almost \$ 10 million for the entire period of its existence. It is unclear if the owner of the holding, to which the plant belonged, and his assistants knew about this, but all senior managers are arrested, including Matthew.

He is listening anxiously to Ben in the meeting room, separated from him by a glass partition.

- "Calm down, Matt. I'm trying to get you out. I'm conducting negotiations with the right people."

- "Negotiations. When will this all end? Ben, I've been sitting here for a month now. We were framed. Get me out! I ask you only about this."

- "They are asking for too much money. I do not have that amount."

- "You said that you have connections everywhere. I'm going crazy here! Do you hear me? Get me out. Use all my savings, if necessary."

- "Calm down. We'll figure something out."

- "Tell my family I'm all right. Didn't Nora call you?"

- "Forget. She will not call."

- "We swore to each other that we will always be together."

- "It was you who swore."

A few months later the trial takes place. Matt is sentenced to two years probation and is released right in the court. The rest are unlucky.

Thin, battered Matt comes to Ben's house. He has been drinking for several days and fell into a deep depression. Ben only comes home sometimes. Matt devastates the home bar, but his friend is not going to replenish it. Matthew does not have any savings, everything melts away into the hands of lawyers. Ben is withholding money so that he does not drink. On rare visits home, he sometimes brings packets of food, and they eat together, trying not to meet each other's eyes. Matt asks what he should do next, but Ben never answers. Their fun trips to nightclubs stop. They are almost not talking to each other. Ben, who is still

groomed avoids his friend and almost ceases to come to the apartment. Matt is ashamed to return home to his parents in this form and goes away. At first, he tries to provide small services near the supermarket for small change. Soon the street becomes his home, as Ben doesn't come home for weeks. One day they meet at a dark abandoned factory. A boy who is looking at Matt with a mixture of contempt and pity gives him a note with the time and the place of the meeting.

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Matt, who turns into a tortured homeless alcoholic, fell to his knees in front of Ben.

- "Where have you been? Why did you leave me?"

- "I'm sorry, Matt?" - Ben is crying, not holding his tears back.

- "It's ok. Everything will be fine. I think it's time to return home. It's better to be there than to rot here like a beggar."

- "No. Nothing will happen. I am to be blamed for everything that happened to you."

- "No, my friend. It is fate who played a cruel joke with me. And I could not resist and broke."

- "No, it was we who played a cruel joke with you. You do not understand. All these years I've been deceiving you. I gave you wealth, power, luxury. And I took everything away from you."

Ben pulls out a gun and points it at Matt. Matt simply turns his back on him, deciding that death is an easier way out than a shameful return home.

- "Why did you do that?" - asks Matt through tears.

- "I had no choice," - Ben's voice is tired and almost devoid of emotion.

- "These are animals who have no choice. A human always has it."

- "Not this time. Forgive me, but I like an animal on sight."

- "For what? Why? What for?" - Matt repeats quietly, takes out a dirty handkerchief from his pocket and wipes his tears away.

- "I don't know. We have been elected."

- "By whom?"

- "If I knew, I would find the answers to all my questions."

- "What kind of power is this? The Government?"

- "No, much more. I do not know who they are. These people, who made me do it, they knew everything about us down to the smallest details. I feel like the last creep," - Ben looks at Matt again, wiping his tears away.

- "What are you talking about? Tell me?"

- "All these last few years these creeps have been controlling me. I do not want to exist like this anymore. I need a normal human life."

- "Who is controlling you?"

- "I don't know!" - Ben screams at him, - "They're like ghosts. About seven years ago I received an anonymous message. I did not pay attention to it. Someone said hello to me, and I answered him, damn him. Then the most unexpected happened: he described my clothes, the layout of the room I was in and my food. I jumped from my chair. I looked out the window, inspected the apartment, checked the TV, the sofas, thinking cameras were hidden somewhere. Mockery messages kept coming, like: "Do not look for me, I'll find you myself." I immediately went to the cellular company, asked the operators to find out the number of the sender of the anonymous messages. When I took out my phone to show him the messages, they were not there - they were deleted automatically. Everyone looked at me like I was a madman. In a couple of days, messages with threats began to come. I changed a few numbers, a few cell phones, buying them in completely spontaneous places so that these people had no opportunity to slip me a phone with a "bug", but they found me again and again. They knew every member of my family: their names, where they worked, what they loved. I wrote a statement to the police about the threats. The next morning in my bathroom, I found my sister's ring, which she always wore. It was their warning. These creeps were at her house and took the ring off her finger.

- "What happened to her?"

- "Nothing. My sister was surprised when I called and made an appointment. She looked calm, as usual. I asked about the ring, she said that she did not remember when she took it off and where did she put it. She was afraid that she lost it in the pool. I pretended that I found the ring under the couch." - Ben swallows

convulsively, having recalled it.

They knew everything. Where I was going and with whom I was mixing, what was doing, what I was wearing. I turned the whole house upside down in search of a camera. I began to suspect that every passer-by was in a conspiracy with them. I was slowly going mad. I could not resist and surrendered, and I became their puppet. They were leaving envelopes with assignments and money in my empty apartment. The tasks were easy, and they were paying me very well. I changed the lock in the apartment several times, but it was useless. They managed to come in without knocking out the door. I was afraid to tell about it to my relatives and acquaintances because I did not want them to suffer. And once I found your photo in the envelope.

- "Was I a part of their project?"

- "Yes."

- "But why do they need to ruin someone's life?"

- "For them it's just a project. A kind of show! Give a person everything and take it away from him in a moment."

- "Show?" - the man on his knees repeats like an echo, - "And I'm a fool," - he laughs hysterically, - "Believed in a fairy tale that I achieved all this myself, on my own. Thank you! At least my father has a house now."

- "I'm sorry ... I'm the biggest shrimp."

- "That's true. Maybe they killed Danny so that we could meet?"

- "I don't know."

- "And what about Nora? Love of my life? Was it their job too?"

- "I don't know for sure, Matt. They didn't say anything about her. But I suspect that this is so. I met her several times when I was fulfilling their assignments in different parts of the city. Too often to be just coincidences."

- "So, did they order you to kill me?"

- "Yes."

- "So, what are you waiting for?"

- "I cannot do it. They promised that they will disappear after this last

assignment, but I do not believe it.”

- “Who the hell are they?” - Matt almost cried, - “Looks like paranoia or a crappy spy thriller, which, the four of us loved to look in childhood. Do you remember?”

- “If this could be stopped, but they are all-powerful.”

- “Maybe you're just crazy? What if there is no corporation that completely manages you? Are you sure you're all right? Maybe it's an invention?”

- “Damn it, how come I have so much money then? How could I find you a job in an enterprise where I have never been and did not know anyone? They dug deep, found out about the debts, gave you, the stupid, the power to try another life, and then spill the beans about taxes. They were controlling even your requests to help, restraining my desire to bail you out right away.”

- “If this will save you, do your job. Just tell my father that I love him very much.”

A shot sounds in the darkness.

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Matt is sitting in Ben's apartment. A small bag is in front of him. He is collecting his stuff and takes a photo depicting the cheerful and laughing friends at the nightclub. Matt is crying. There is no one to be ashamed of. A text message “Forgive me!” from an unknown number is displayed on the screen of the phone lying on the nightstand.

#### About the author

“Once upon a time a reader told me that my past life was filled with books and maritime adventures. I worked in a library on some kind of a cruise ship. Being a visionary child with a boisterous imagination I took it as a clear coin and acted accordingly from that day forward. My subconscious mind told me to read and write, envisioning stories. I followed my calling by writing essays on my favorite literary masterpieces and accompanying them with hesitant childish drawings that caused my writing to flourish with life and movement. Every sentence was vivid with my cinematic prose. This creative work was my secret weapon, helping me to combat the loneliness of my adolescence. It provided me with a treasure-filled-hideaway where I always was able to discover understanding and love through true friendship. Imagination

works as a miraculous crystal ball that can tell you what may happen with you in the future. And the greatest gift we have is to be able to paint our futures the way we envision them. Belief is the key to this door where creation becomes visible, and action is the secret magic powder that gives you an ability to touch and feel, breathe and live the reality of this dream-realized life. I live my dream only because I believed in it all my life and every step I made was moving me closer to the very top of the mountain of my life.”

Olya Aman