

OLYA AMAN

My Friend

In Friendship
We Share Good And Bad



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Olya Aman

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Story

Autumn has just come to the streets of typical American suburbs. It gilds the crowns of the trees with its palm and there are already fallen leaves in some places. After a light but steady rain an old jeep drives down the long street, along which one-and two-story houses are in regular rows. There is no sun, and the day seems bleak. Raindrops glitter on the windshield, where old windshield wipers cannot reach them. It seems that the car is crying. The mood inside the car is appropriately gloomy. A pretty woman about 35 years old, sitting behind the wheel, stares at the road, which shines in front of her. She deliberately ignores the looks that the boy sitting on the passenger seat throws at her. By the same chestnut hair and cheerfully upturned noses, everyone understands that these are a mother and son.

The woman confidently turns into the asphalt driveway of a house with a typical mini-lawn behind the decorative fence. There is nothing special, as most families of the “middle class” live in this area. But she is struggling to keep herself here. The woman turned the engine off and silently leaves the car and lets her irritation break through, slamming the door with force. A 12-year-old boy dressed in a neat school uniform, deliberately slowly throws a backpack onto his shoulders. His emotions almost do not differ from his mother’s, but he closes the door carefully and silently.

The silence of a deserted street is disturbed by the woman’s voice.

- “Mark, have you closed the door?” – She did not hear the child’s answer and

repeated angrily, - “Did you hear me? I'm talking to you.”

The boy sighs tiredly and answers quietly:

- “Yes, Mom, I closed the door.”

They approach the house in the ringing silence. The boy walks half a step behind his mother. Her sharp movements, the way she opens the door loudly ringing her keys, her strained back – this all promises an unpleasant conversation.

Mark takes off his shoes leisurely. He walks to the center of the living room, throws his backpack on the sofa, standing in the middle of the room, and sits down. His mother sits down on the armchair on the left of the sofa and begins staring at her son.

- “Well, now explain to me, please, how should I understand this?”

The boy does not look at his mother, and gazing intently at his fingernails, begins to defend himself. Because of this, his figure loses determination and he looks guilty. He obviously does not like this conversation.

- “Michael and I just...”

His mother interrupts him and bursts into a tirade as if she has been expecting this name like athletes wait for the “go” command:

- “Michael, Michael. Again this Michael. Maybe enough? When I hear this name, I get goosebumps. I begin to think, what did he do this time? How many times have I told you not to go after him? Someday he will get you into big trouble.”

- “Mom, please understand, we just wanted to release pigeons from the school attic. They asked for help.”

- “Oh my God, Mark!” - the woman's voice falters, - “And what if you fell down? I know for sure, it was Michael's idea to climb to this damned roof. The teacher constantly complains to his mother that he always has some unusual fantasies.”

- “No, Michael is good. He always helps if someone needs help.”

- “No way. The teacher assures me that there are no pigeons in the school attic. So I'm sure - this is another one of his fantasies.”

- “No, there are.”

- “Ok, Mark! That's enough! From now on, I forbid you to communicate with Michael.”

The boy finally looks up from his contemplation. He looks at his mother with fright and indignation.

- “Mom, we have been sitting together at one desk since the first grade.”

- "I'm done! I'll call Mrs. William to make sure that you are separated. That's enough! Yesterday you missed class because you took food to a fictional homeless person who exists only in Michael's fantasies. Today pigeons asked for help. By the way, how did they manage to do that, huh?" - the woman pauses for a moment and continues, - "So, what will happen tomorrow? What else will he invent, and where will you climb at his whim? That's enough!"

Realizing that it is useless to argue, Mark takes his backpack and goes to his room. The boy sits down on the bed and overhears a telephone conversation through a slightly open door.

- "Hello! Hi, Mrs. Smith! This is Mark's mom. Yes, yes, I talked to him and scolded him. I was so worried when I got a call from school. How is your son Michael? Is he all right? Please, explain to him that during his lessons, he must forget about his fantasies and concentrate on his studies. Yes, please."

Because of the pause, Mark guesses that Michael's mother is explaining something. He understands what when his mother's voice sounds again:

- "Yes, I understand. But can you imagine, they took food, which I gave him in the morning for lunch to some homeless person? Today the pigeons on the roof asked for help. Tomorrow they will decide to go to the lake, and God forbid, I do not even want to think about it. So, I talked to Mark. He understood everything. Yes, yes... I understand, Mrs. Smith, and I'm trying to put myself in your place, but you must understand me too. We must do something with this. Good. Bye!"

The boy quietly lies down on the bed right over the veil and closes his eyes.

The next day, Mark sits at the desk with Michael as he had been doing from the first class, and began a conversation without paying attention to the call:

- "Yesterday my mother was furious because of the pigeons. She forbade us to sit together."

The red-haired boy with a porcelain-white face and a scattering of freckles on his nose says quietly:

- "My mother was angry too. They don't understand. I just wanted to help."

- "I know..."

A young teacher, Mrs. William, who was writing the topic of the lesson on the blackboard, looked back at the whisper behind her back, - "Stop it immediately! Otherwise, one of you will now go to a free desk, and after the lessons both of you will go to the principal."

The boys look at each other and become silent. As soon as the teacher

continues her work, a man comes into the classroom and leaves after saying a few words to her in a low voice.

The teacher nods her head in agreement and declares:

- “Children! A doctor has come to our school. I ask you to get up and go together to the nurse’s office for examination. These are regular checks so that you won’t get sick and you’ll go to school every day.”

The children jump up happily. This is much more interesting than the lesson. On the way to the nurse’s office boys play and tease the girls. The friends are lagging behind. Now nobody is preventing them from talking, but they don’t bring up the ban. Michael says thoughtfully:

- “I don’t want to be checked. I’m alright. Maybe we’ll go and see if there are pigeons on the roof?”

- “No, Michael, if my mother finds out she will kill me! We’ll do what others do.

The doctor in a white coat kindly examines everyone. The nurse takes blood behind the screen. Mark undergoes the procedure, then Michael.

In their everyday routine, days fly by like leaves, which are strewn on the road and the sidewalks. The rain does not stop for several days. The wind bends the branches of trees and it seems as if they are trying to knock on the windows of houses. It feels that soon autumn will give way to winter.

At night Mark wakes up in a cold sweat. He has nightmares, but he is trying not to think about them. Most of all he wants to run to his mother, but the boy gets out of bed, puts on slippers and goes to the kitchen. He pours a glass of water and drinks it thirstily. Returning to his room, Mark accidentally sees the white rectangle of an envelope on the table in the living room.

The curious boy looks around, listens and begins to read. His face becomes distressed, and the corners of his lips turn down. The content of the letter shocks the small, fragile child. He quickly puts the letter back. Mark begins to cry quietly in his bed, hiding his face deep in the pillow. His shivering shoulders twitch in the dim light from the window like unformed wings. The letter turns his life around. It seems that the boy is about to scream in pain, but he only squeezes the pillow more tightly.

In the morning his mother comes into his room and calls tenderly:

- "Mark, my son, get up!" – she kisses him on the forehead and says, - “It’s time to go to school. Breakfast is ready.”

The boy dresses and goes to the kitchen. At the table, Mark barely touches his favorite food. He is looking around, searching for the envelope with his eyes, but it is not in the living room. His mother looks at him closely and asks:

- "What happened to you?"

- "Nothing," - he says, as he decides not to talk about his nightly discovery. – "I had a nightmare."

- "You're big already. Do not pay attention to them," - the woman gets up from the chair, goes to her son and hugs him, - "These are just dreams. I love you!"

The day at school flies by imperceptibly for Mark. He walks next to Michael on a wet road. Other children are overtaking them, running. Mark begins the conversation:

- "Have you ever regretted something?"

His friend sighs:

- "Often. I would like to correct a lot of things."

- "And I regret that I woke up yesterday."

Michael smiles ridiculously, which used to always make Mark laugh, but he does not react.

- "You know, Michael, my mother is very nice and kind. She swears sometimes, but I'm not offended. And today she was especially affectionate. She hugged me."

The red-haired friend looks at him in surprise.

- "Hey, so what?"

The boy sighs and blurts out:

- "She did not even hint that not everything is all right with us."

- "What are you talking about?"

- "Why me?"

- "What are you talking about? Are you all right?"

Mark slows down and stops:

- "My house is 50 meters from here. Your house is 60 meters from here. We'll go home, and each of us will have our own life. We will not know what each of us is doing. So I want to tell you what I will be doing so that you know. You're my friend from childhood. We've been sitting together at one desk from the first grade. You're like a brother to me."

Michael jokingly puts his hand on his friend's forehead:

- "You're acting very strange!"

But Mark ignores his irony and continues:

- "So. I'll go home and hug my mother for being so clever, kind and caring. This day I will dedicate to her because she gave me so many happy days. I will not leave her alone. I'll give her my smile so that she would not be upset. Let her not

think that I know everything.”

Michael becomes serious:

- “What do you know? What are you talking about? Are you sick?”

Mark's lips begin to tremble treacherously, but he continues his confession:

- “Do you remember? A couple of weeks ago we had a medical examination?”

- “Yes”.

- “The results have come,” - tears tingled in the corners of the boy's eyes, -

“Michael, I am terminally ill. I have cancer. It is written like this.”

- “What? This can't be true!”

- “Unfortunately this is the truth. I read it all by chance at night. In the morning my mother hid the letter from me. She was as kind and gentle to me, as never before. I felt it. I don't want to part with her.”

- “Never mind. Don't think about what is written in those papers. The doctor could be mistaken.”

Michael looks at Mark, waiting for his reaction, but he replies seriously:

- “I don't know. This letter touched me very much. And my mother behaved suspiciously in the morning.”

- “She has always loved you. You just have never paid attention to it. And today you noticed it.”

Mark looks around sadly. He has tears in his eyes, but he hides them from his friend. He doesn't want to seem weak to him. He takes a package with lunch out of his backpack:

- “Well, shall we go to Mr. Ben?”

It is already dark when Mark returns home. His mother breaks away from the TV, hearing the steps of her son, and asks strictly:

- “Why were you gone for such a long time?”

- “Michael and I went to Mr. Ben. The homeless man. I gave him my lunch, and Michael gave him coins.”

- “The homeless man? Mr. Ben? Have you invented names for your fantasies, too? My son. Maybe that's enough? You and Michael have been inventing different heroes and have been playing with them since childhood. It's time to grow up.” - the woman stops and almost begs, - “Come here!”

The boy and his mother embrace, the woman kisses her son and pulls him tightly to her.

- “Do you want to eat?”

Mark shakes his head, and she makes him an unexpected proposal:

- "Do you want to go Michael? You can spend some time with him, play something. Just change your clothes."

Mark looks up and meets his mother's sad and weary look, and begins to study her face as if for the first time. Mother unclasps her embrace:

- "What? Go before I change my mind."

The boys are playing a video game in Michael's living room. The door opens and Michael's mother comes in with bags in hands. Mark greets her politely:

- "Hello, Mrs. Smith!"

- "Hi, Mark! Are you playing?" - she passes the boys going to the kitchen and justifying herself before her son, - "I had to stay at work."

She looks depressed and tired.

Mark addresses his friend:

- "Our mothers are sad today. Maybe my mother told your mother about the letter?"

Michael is carried away by the game, making some sounds, and not paying attention to Mark, but he continues:

- "My mother let me go to you, even though I came home late. Usually, she gets angry and closes my room with a key, so that I do my homework. Don't you think this is strange?"

Michael does not tear himself away from the screen, but an insistent friend touches his arm:

- "Hey, I know you hear me. You just do not want to talk about it. I almost remembered by heart what was printed at the end: "All analysis say one thing. We have sent them to another laboratory, but the answer was the same. Your son can leave you at any time. Give him joy and love. Dr. Richard Taylor."

Michael throws the joystick suddenly and pushes Mark onto the sofa. The boy's eyes are shining with anger and tears. He whispers loudly:

- "Do you think it's nice to hear all this? I don't want to lose you! You won't die! Do you want me to sit at the same desk with Kevin or David? We have not done much yet, and you have already surrendered! Stop whimpering like a girl!"

Mark looks at his friend in surprise. It is the first time he sees him act like that. Michael sits on the sofa again and takes the joystick. Shocked Mark tries to apologize:

- "Sorry. I did not want it to work out that way! I just do not want to die!"

Michael puts the joystick down and says, looking into Mark's eyes:

- "Yesterday, when I came from school, my mother spoke with someone on the phone. I did not know who was on the line, and then after the conversation, I realized that it was your mother. I... I did not tell you that. I heard only a part of the conversation. My mother did not see how I came home. Our mothers were crying. They know everything, but they do not want to upset you! I guess your mom cannot find a place."

- "I must talk to her. But how will I say that I accidentally read it and knew everything from the very beginning?"

The cold replaces the rain and even a little snow has already fallen. One day Mark returns from school, carefully puts his backpack down, washes his hands and sits down at the table. He makes a decision, but he cannot begin a conversation. His mother is setting the table. Mark has been watching her for a long time and blurts out:

- "Mom, I know everything!"

The woman is immersed in her thoughts. She does not attach much importance to intonation and the phrase itself, and continues serving:

- "So, what do you know, sonny?"

- "I know about the letter."

A cup slips from her hands and breaks on the floor. The woman tries to pretend that she has not heard anything, and begins to clean up the fragments.

Mark repeats:

- "I'm talking about the letter from Dr. Richard. Tell me, how long were you going to hide this from me? Why didn't you tell me this at once? I read it the same day the envelope was brought. By chance."

Mom throws the shards from the dustpan into the trash can and slowly approaches Mark.

- "My son, I didn't want you to be upset. I wanted to save you."

- "From what, Mom? I've known about this all these days."

- "I was so much afraid that this news will hurt you. Will you forgive me?"

His mother hugs him tightly, and they do not hold their tears back.

The boy sobs:

- "I don't want to lose you, Mom!"

- "Baby, you won't lose me. What are you talking about?"

- "I don't want to die!"

- "What? What are you talking about?"

The woman opens her hands, and looks at him in astonishment, hardly

moving away from her son.

- "Wait. Did you look at the envelope from the outside? Did you read the address?"

- "No, why? It was lying on our table. In our living room."

Mother sits on the floor near the feet of her son, covering his little hands with her hands, gets down on her knees, and tears begin to stream down her cheeks.

- "My son, forgive me ... I did not want you to hear this from me. The envelope was addressed to Mrs. Smith. She was not at home, and the postman left it to me, saying that this was an urgent letter. Michael's mother was at work and came later. I gave the letter to her in the morning. It is Michael who is terminally ill." Mark freezes in a daze. He looks at his sobbing mother and is unable to say anything.

The days pass. Snowflakes fall quietly to the street. The phone rings. Mark's mother picks it up. Mrs. William's voice sounds polite:

- "Hello! I understand you and Mark perfectly, but we must live on and study. We cannot miss lessons for more than three days without a doctor's certificate."

Mark's mother hesitates for only a second:

- "Yes. I understand. He has not been out of bed for several days. He eats nothing and is mostly silent. I'm very worried about him. Give us a few more days, please. I need to talk to him."

- "Do you want the school psychologist to work with your son? She is an excellent specialist and I'm sure she can help him."

- "Thank you, Mrs. William! I think we can handle it. Thank you!"

A few days later, Mark returns to school. He is sitting at his desk, copying what the teacher has written. The seat nearby is empty. The boy looks at the empty chair thoughtfully.

After school he goes home. When he turns his head, he sees Michael, who is walking alongside dressed in his uniform. There is no hat on his head, but the snow is not falling on his red hair. It is hot. He tries to unbutton his jacket, but loses consciousness and falls on the ground.

Knocking sounds at the door of Mark's house. His mother opens it and sees that an unknown man in an old black coat and a knitted hat with loops in some places is holding the unconscious child with both hands. She rushes to him in horror:

- "What's wrong with him? Oh my God! What happened?"

The man brings Mark to the sofa in the living room and puts the boy down carefully.

- "Calm down, miss. He has a fever. He fainted on the way. Now he is just sleeping."

The woman takes the shoes and jacket off her child. She touches his hot forehead and asks the stranger:

- "Would you please help me to bring him into the room?"

The man looks down at his shoes, but Mark's mother waves him in, inviting him to the kid's room.

The man delicately leaves the mother and the child in the room, and shifts from one foot to the other in the living room, not daring to leave without saying goodbye.

The woman appears and starts to say, embarrassed:

- "Thank you very much! I do not know how to thank you."

- "Never mind. We pay the same for every act. I have to go to work. So much snow piled up."

- "Do you work for a snow plowing company?"

- "No, I'm a janitor. I was lucky to be recently offered this job. And I really have to go."

- "Wait! I'm sorry. I did not even offer you tea or coffee."

She fussily pours water with slightly trembling hands and presses the button. The man stops her:

- "Thanks, but I really need to go."

- "Maybe at least one cup?"

- "Sorry, I risk losing my job. If this happens, the street is waiting for me! I'm so tired of this all."

He bows slightly and turns to the door. Mark's mother follows him.

- "I'm so awkward in front of you."

- "Never mind! I just owe him. Give him my best wishes."

He leaves the house, but the woman does not close the door. As if coming to herself, she shouts:

- "What is your name?"

The man shouts:

- "Just Ben!"

Mark's mother closes the door and is lost in thought, leaning against the door. She repeats the words: "Mr. Ben! Mr. Ben!" as a prayer.

The woman looks in her son's room, making sure that he is sleeping. She puts on a jacket, takes the house keys, locks the door, and runs along the street.

She runs into the school out of breath and hardly dodging children. The teacher leaves the classroom and her face reflects surprise:

- "You? Here?"

- "Hello, Mrs. William, I need to check something."

- "But, Mark has gone home a long time ago."

- "Yes, I know. He is already at home. Sleeping. I'm sorry, I have to hurry."

The woman passes by and walks down the corridor under the astonished gaze of the teacher. She rises up the stairs to the roof, opens the door and takes a few steps forward. There are some things from school theatrical productions in the big attic. There is no glass in the small window. She steps a little forward and suddenly something flies right in front of her face. The woman flinches but realizes that these are pigeons. One of them became entangled in rope nets. She quietly approaches, picks the pigeon up gently, and feels its heart beating. The woman gently releases the wings and the feet from the net. She approaches the window, kisses the pigeon and opens her hands releasing it and saying:

- "Fly away! And don't come back here again!"

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