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You know, the masculine memory has its own principal differences; it's very different from our memory, that of females. And because of this, we recount the same events with entirely different stories.

I first considered this when my husband, thanks to the World Wide Web, discovered on a social networking site his old classmate and first love, Lina Sandler. Thirty years ago, Lina immigrated to Canada, and at present, was teaching at a university and happily living in her own home near her children and grandchildren. A perfectly successful and established life...

After an emotional and wild back-and-forth exchange of news—and believe me, there was quite a lot of news after the three decades in which they had been out of touch—Lina sent her childhood friend a current picture.

Against the background of a light blue pool on a terrace, enclosed by scarlet roses, sat a plump, round-faced matron surrounded by grandchildren.

My husband was shocked.

“This is Lina?!” He ran around the apartment all evening in a worry, glancing over and over again at the photograph, “But it can't be!”

“Why not?” I asked surprised. “She's a lovely woman, well-groomed, a bit large, but that comes with age.”

“What do you know?!” yelled my husband, sorrowfully raising his arms to the air. “Lovely! She was an angel! With a small waist and long legs! Her violet eyes, her orange curls! You've, you've never even seen her...”

There was so much sorrow in his voice.

“My dear, she's 58, not 22. What do you expect, after so many years?”

“What do I expect?” my husband froze, glancing at me like a deer in headlights. He rubbed his bristly chin absent-mindedly. “I don't even know.”

“What about yourself?” I was getting angry. “Look carefully at the mirror and compare with a forty-year-old photograph!”

My husband sulked, wilted, and went to watch TV. All day, he was in a defeated, melancholy state of mind.

Men are an odd breed; they seem to believe that their first touching love doesn't age, doesn't change, and isn't, like the rest of us, subject to the inexorable passage of time. Preserved somewhere in the depths of memory, imprinted in the deep of their universe, she doesn't grow older, doesn't become covered with wrinkles, doesn't sag with folds of fat, but remains as in youth, thin, gentle, violet-eyed...

Twenty-five years later at a literary party in the House of Writers, where I ended up completely accidentally during a short stay in St. Petersburg, I met an old acquaintance. Thirty years prior when I had been a student in the journalism department, he had headed a fancy literary journal and seemed to me unreachable, almost saintly. Now he was an elderly, tired, and negligently dressed gentleman. And on that day, most people saw me as saintly, having flown in from the prosperous West, wearing an elegant outfit and with a stylish haircut, in order to attend this ordinary literary gathering.

Elderly writers, who yesterday were the molders of opinion, surprised me with their barely-hidden poverty and unsettled nature.

Everything had changed in this world. Ideals, illusions, and values, through which my youth so brightly blossomed, disappeared without a trace in a black hole of greedy capitalism. Who in this "country of victorious cash" needs their naïve ponderings about eternity?

Writers obviously and eagerly expected an end to the loud, officious reports and an invitation to be able to come up to the already-set table. And when, finally, a pause was announced and everyone began to grab pies and sandwiches, I understood that many of them were simply hungry.

"How could this be?" I bitterly asked the friend who came in with me, "I didn't think that the writers of Petersburg are in such a deplorable state."

"What do you expect? Pensions are tiny, and books practically bring in no income," my friend answered, energetically chewing his food. "Well, maybe the most hyped authors...but print editions aren't circulating, the Internet has consumed everything..."

And at that moment, the old Department Head noticed me.

"Dear God, is that really you?" he shouted excitedly.

We walked together on the evening shore, lit up by the yellow spots of the Petersburg lamps and talked.

“And I thought you had long forgotten about me...who was I then? A completely stupid little girl.”

“You were a beauty,” he said, absolutely serious. “Actually, why ‘were?’ You’re still pretty. But then...you were blinding, yet I couldn’t look away. I was even afraid to look at you...”

“Why didn’t you come up and say anything?” I asked, genuinely surprised.

“What, could one just come up to you like that?”

I began to remember myself and my first naïve steps in the literary field, made under the supervision of this intelligent and talented person.

“Remember how the editor of the poetry section used to come and say,” I frowned, lowered my voice, and did my best to mimic the familiar tone, “‘Dear, watch out for writers. Writers—they are a dangerous people; they don’t so much think how to sleep with a woman as how they will write about it.’”

“Of course I remember...you wouldn’t believe how well I remember everything...”

And he started telling me about the past, with such accuracy, as if a feature-length movie of his life were developing in front of him, with replicas of the characters and a truthful landscape.

It’s this masculine oddity of memory—to keep the details, ins and outs, colors, smells, which long ago would have weathered away from the feminine mind with the unforgiving passage of blunted time—that I became aware of only recently.

My friend and I appeared at an international conference of Slavic peoples, which was proceeding in the wonderful resort city of Bavaria. Professors of Russian Language from all around the world gathered at the conference. We spent half the day listening to reports and lectures, participating in round tables and discussions, and half the day walking through the clean, toy-like German streets, window-shopping the boutiques, and enjoying life.

My soul was singing. I had spent so long living near the cold ocean of a foreign language that turned into a familiar irritating background, or

around immigrants, full of verbal inconsistencies, with an abundance of words brought in from Ukraine and Moldova, that when I appeared in the waters of great, correct, and refined literary speak of the experts and lovers of “the grand and powerful,” I was filled with bliss. The same way I once felt in my youth when I listened to the lectures of professors from the Petersburg university, famous ancient pillars of Russian and foreign literature.

And so, my friend, who was a Russian professor, and I, accompanied by other participants of the seminar, set off on an excursion of the memorable sites of the city. The tour guide, a youthful, intelligent woman, spoke of famous Russians buried at the Wiesbaden cemetery.

Next to us stood Simon Lentz, a former citizen of Petersburg but today a professor of Slavistic philology at an American university.

“I’m sorry, who else besides His Serene Highness is buried at the cemetery?” he asked, “I didn’t catch what you said.”

At the sound of his voice, my friend froze awkwardly, went pale, and then, going up very close to the professor, carefully looked into his face. “Simon, is that you?”

A long pause hung in the air.

The professor perplexedly stared at the sixty-year-old woman in front of him.

“I’m sorry...you are...I don’t seem to recall...”

“It’s a small world!” She spoke the mysterious words, a password of their youth.

“Bella, you?!” he cried happily, instantly transformed, and enclosed her in an embrace. “Bella! Dear! I can’t believe it...”

The voice is an instrument of the soul; it doesn’t age. She recognized him by his voice.

My friend Bella turned out to be the first, most important, and unforgettable love of the American professor. In their student years, they played together in the university musical ensemble “It’s a small world,” wandered around the shores of the Neva in the clear Petersburg nights, kissed on the benches of the Summer Garden.

That was their bright and tremulous youth, compared to which everything that happened later paled.

And the two days until the end of the conference, when they would have to part to opposite ends of the continent, into the cells of their existing, orderly, and regulated lives, the gray-haired professor walked as a youthful and fascinated teenager behind, to be fair, an aged and passé (which is why he didn't recognize her right away) woman and remembered, remembered, remembered...

His memory kept in tact outlandish details—the narrow beaten bracelet on her wrist:

“Oh, yes! My dad brought that back from a business trip in India; no one else had one...”

And the cream pantsuit, unbelievably popular in those years, that all her friends had been jealous of, and the brunette lock of hair above her ear, and the flowery scent of the perfume “Charlie” which she had worn.

My friend was astounded...in his innermost memory Bella stayed that same charming girl that she herself had difficulty remembering.

Not that my friend couldn't reestablish the details of their teenage romance, she could very well, but completely in a different way. A lot had fallen out of her memory, like the fine sand on seaside cliffs, leaving only the boulders of events.

She remembered where they went, what they did, who they spent time with.

I watched their romance unfolding in front of my eyes and was somewhat jealous.

The span of female blossom is so short. And only the enamored and passionate masculine memory leaves us beautiful and young.

What I wouldn't give to sail into my tremulous youth on the wings of someone's memory, as if it all happened yesterday.

And for someone, in forty years, to tell of how my perfume smelled...