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Men's memory has its fundamental differences; it is completely unlike ours—women. And so, of the same event, we can tell completely different stories.

I first thought about this when my husband, thanks to the global network, found on a Social website his former classmate and first love: Linochka Sandler. Thirty years ago Linochka had immigrated to Canada, and now teaches at a university and lives happily in her own home next to her children and grandchildren. A quite successful and promising fate...

After emotional and turbulent correspondence and exchange of news, after all the happiness of finding out who is with whom and who has what and how—and believe me, a lot had accumulated over the three decades since they had lost sight of each other—Linochka sent her childhood friend a photo. Against the background of a pool on a terrace, overgrown with scarlet roses, sat a plump, round-faced matron surrounded by grandchildren.

My husband was in shock.

“This is Linochka?!...” He ran around the apartment all night in a strange state, looking at the photo over and over. “But this cannot be!”

“And so?” I was surprised. “A cute woman, well-groomed, a little overweight... for her age.”

“What do you know?” yelled my husband, sadly throwing his hands in the air. “Cute! This was an angel! A reed-thin waist and long legs! Violet eyes and red curls! You, you have never seen her.”

There was such sadness in his voice.

“My dear, she is 58 now, not 22, what do you expect, after all these years?”

“What do I expect?” My husband froze, looking at me as though lost. He absentmindedly rubbed his overgrown beard on his chin. “I don't know myself.”

“And you yourself?” I was angry. “Look carefully at yourself in the mirror and compare with photographs from forty years ago.”

My husband pouted, sulked and went to watch television. He remained in a sad, silent state.

Men—a strange people—they somehow think that their first true love does not grow old, does not change and is not susceptible to the turning of time. Preserved somewhere in the depths of memory, imprinted in the deep of their universe, she does not age, is not covered by a web of wrinkles or sagging folds of fat, she remains, as in his youth – thin, soft, with violet eyes.

After 25 years during a brief trip to Petersburg, I completely by chance ran into an old friend in the literary hangout of Writer’s Home. Thirty years prior, I had been a small, inexperienced student of journalism, and he had been in charge of the department’s modern literature journal. He had seemed miles out of my league, almost celestial. Now he was an old, tired, and casually dressed man. And on that day, in the eyes of most, I was probably celestial—flowing in elegance and intelligence, with a stylish haircut from the prosperous and well-fed West, at this mediocre literary evening.

Elderly writers, the former authorities on thought, struck me by their barely disguised poverty and troubles.

Everything was changed in this world. Ideals, illusions, and values that bloomed so brightly in my youth disappeared without a trace in a black hole of greedy capitalism. Who was needed in the “land of the victorious dollar?” had since become the eternal naïve reasoning.

Writers clearly awaited eagerly the end of the enormous, semi-official reports, so that they could take a seat at the table. And when, finally, a pause was called and everyone began to grab pirozhki and sandwiches, I realized that many of them were just hungry.

“How can it be?” I asked bitterly to a friend with whom I had come. “I never thought the writers of Saint Petersburg were in such a deplorable state...”

“And what do you expect? Pensions are short, books are large, practically unprofitable,” he explained, while chewing vigorously. “Well

maybe the top ten most popular authors are. But publishers do not vary; everything is swallowed up by the internet...”

And at that moment I saw the former head of the department.

“Oh my God! It cannot be you!” he shouted happily.

We walked and talked with him along the evening promenade, illuminated by yellow lanterns carved with scenes of Saint Petersburg.

“And I thought you had long forgotten me...Who was I then? A very silly girl.”

“You were a beauty,” he said seriously. “Though, you are still very nice. But then - a simply dazzling beauty, eye-catching. I was afraid to even look at you.”

“Then why did you never say anything?” I asked sincerely.

“And what could I have said to you?”

I began to remember our first naïve steps in literary field, made under the direction of this wise and talented man.

“Remember, how the poetry editor came and said,” I furrowed by brows, lowering my voices, trying to mimic the familiar intonation, and said: “My dear, beware writers. Writers are dangerous people, they don’t just think of how to sleep with a women, but also how they will write about it.”

“Of course I remember... you have no idea how well I remember that...”

And he began to speak to me about the past, as clearly as if it unfolded before him as a full-length film with his storylines of replicated heroes, planned landscapes, and staging.

That is the strange thing about the memories of men—to hold on to details, particulars, colors, smells, all which would have long ago faded from a woman’s mind under the relentless running of time. It all recently became quite clear to me.

I was with a friend at an international Slavic conference, held in the charming resort town of Bavaria. Russian language teachers from around the world came to the conference. Half of the day we spent listening to reports and lectures, attending round table discussions; the other half we spent walking around quaint little German streets, looking in windows of boutiques and enjoying ourselves.

My soul sang. For so long I had lived within the cold waters of foreign language which turned into a familiar annoying background, or amongst immigrants with husky voices and plenty of Ukrainian and Moldovan village dialect. When I found myself amongst magnificent, proper, and refined language connoisseurs, I simply floated in bliss. It reminded me of how I, in my youth, listened to professors at university in Petersburg lecture about famous ancient pillars of Russian and foreign literature.

So, a friend who teaches Russian language and I, in the company of other seminar participants, went on a tour of the city's memorials. The guide, a youthful and intelligent lady, talked about the famous Russians buried in Visbadenska cemetery.

Near us stood Simon Lenz, a former Petersburger and now a professor of Slavistic philology at an American university.

"Excuse me, who besides the peaceful beneath us are buried in this cemetery?" he asked, "I did not hear."

My friend froze strangely at the sound of his voice, and then came quite close to the professor, gazing carefully at his face, and said: "Simon, is that you?"

A long pause hung in the air.

The professor looked at her, puzzled, standing in front of a 60-year-old woman.

"Forgive me...You...I do not remember..."

"Little country," she said, cryptic words, a password to their youth.

"Belka is it you?!" he bellowed with joy, instantly transformed, and enveloped her in an embrace. "Belochka! My dear! How can it be?"

The voice—an instrument of the soul, does not age. She knew him by his voice.

My friend Bella was the first, main, and unforgettable love of the American professor. In their student years they played together in the musical ensemble "Little country," on a clear Petersburg night on the banks of the Neva, kissing on the benches of the Summer Garden...

And there it was—that was their bright and vibrant youth, which everything that happens later pales to in comparison.

In the two remaining days of the conference, before they would each scatter to opposite sides of the continent, to their regulated and orderly lives – a gray-haired professor became a young, enthralled teenager – though aged and faded (such that he could not immediately recognize her), he remembered and remembered, remembered and remembered...

His memory preserved ridiculous details—the narrow hammered bracelet on her wrist: “Of course, my dad brought this back for me from a business trip to India, no one else had one...” And unusual for those years, a pantsuit which was the envy of her the girls at school, the chestnut curls behind her ears, and a floral perfume “Charlie” which she had worn.

My friend was amazed... in his deep hidden memories, Bella remained the same charming girl, which she could hardly remember herself. Not that my friend was unable to recall the details of their youthful romance; she could. She remembered where they went, what they did, who they talked to.

I watched their story of memories unfolding before my eyes, and was somewhat envious. The age of female blossoming was so short-lived...

Only love and the passionate memory of men keeps us beautiful and young. To go back like that on the wings of someone’s memories, to return fleetingly to youth, as if it happened yesterday.

And for someone to remember the smell of my perfume forty years later.