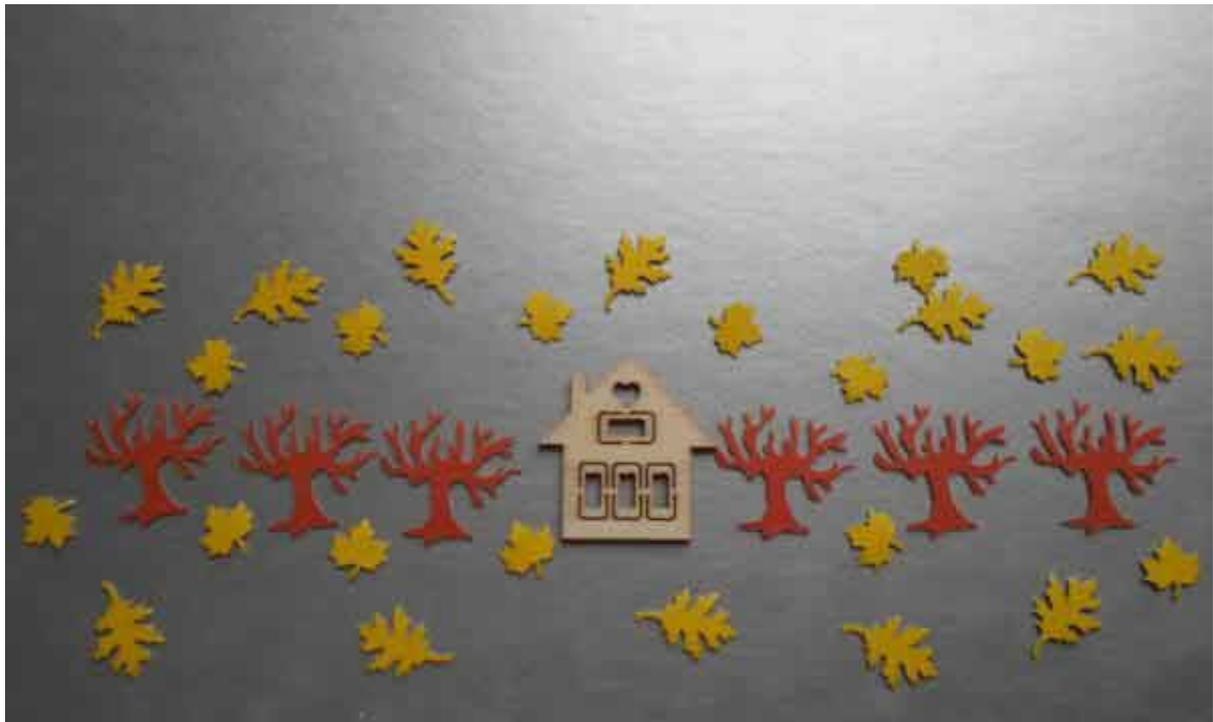


Nook in the wood.

short story by Kate AKS (Katerina Aksonova)



- Hello, - Nancy said a little bit louder. - Hello, anybody is here?

She checked her phone, was just nine o'clock. Probably everyone were in the dining room of the hotel. But she didn't hear voices of hotel guests. Sound of TV also was missed. And when taxi was near hotel, Nancy didn't notice lot of light. Taxi driver suggested that all windows closed because of wind which was yesterday and made a lot of damage.

Nancy moved from forehead blond twisted strand of hair, it was her new haircut and for now she didn't use to it. It should be more romantic and soft, something more creative, strict office style was wrong decision for freelance job. Instead of white blouses and black jacket now Nancy's wardrobe was full of soft knitwear and little collection of shawls and scarfs. She even add few dresses with flowers print, something that wasn't in her shopping list before. Spokeswoman of bank should look professional, ghost writer could have glasses in red frame and fountain pen with butterfly on it. For trip Nancy choose – caramel coat, which created more relaxed image in combination with without hills boots, jeans and green sweater with big soft collar. Details, Bex, as writer probably notice whole preparations, but Nancy wanted to impress and look more writer's friendly.

- Hello! - Repeated Nancy.

Nancy made pause and listened. It was hotel's lobby, not forest, someone should be there. "How long I should wait till phone and ask if someone will pick me up? But I am already in the building. Ring didn't work, but it could be usual in such old building. How old is this building?"

Who lived before in this building till it became hotel? Why someone will remade own house to hotel? And where recent owners now?”

Nancy wondered if this, decorated on perils with autumn leaves, steps will make some noise, when you walk on them. How many rooms are in whole hotel, if there aren't board with keys to count? Who crocheted all table napkins, which were even under switch off monitor in the lobby? How look all house when there is sun and not foggy evening? Was red color with white shutters on windows before or it was just made to make whole place more picturesque and cozy? Was rocking chair with patchwork pillow on it decorative or someone could sit there? Nancy tried to pay attention to everything around her to calm down herself, because she was a little scary of this place's tranquility, no matter that it has welcoming vanilla's smell of fresh bakery.

Now Nancy believed that taxi too soon left her on the porch of hotel. And there wasn't light near front door not because of wind and drizzling rain, was too cold and trees had too long shadows. Also she believed that made bad decision when chose caramel coat over practical warm black jacket to arrive and if she now will change clothes it will be strange video on security cameras, not to mention that put wet coat in the bag will be stupid. And Nancy slowly started to unbutton coat.

- Hello. - Almost whispered Nancy.

- Sorry, that you waited. - Because of man's voice Nancy jumped on place. - Sorry, didn't want to scare you. Checked electricity, we will need some time to restart whole systems. Not whole, maybe will be some problems with electricity at every room. Sorry that you waited. Glad that you found entrance.

Man walked in the lobby, he still dry with paper towel his hands, in this gesture was more comfort of the entering someone's home than hotel. He put at first on the table, than remove, used towel, as remembered that he wasn't alone. His look also was informal – jeans and pullover put on white T-shirt. There wasn't badge with his name. And with deep soft voice he talked to her as to person whom knew for ages, without necessary formality.

- Me too. - Nodded Nancy. She already made too long pause before answer. - Glad that found entrance.

- Good. Can I help you? - Man in blue jumper looked at her with professional polite smile, like something was switched on and he forgot that each of them should play particular roles. - And welcome to the hotel "Nook in the wood". By the way, I am Clement, co-owner of the hotel.

- Nice to meet you. Nancy Brian. There should be a room for me. - Nancy showed invitation on her phone screen.

- Nancy. Yes, you are the ghost. I mean Bex's ghost. - Nancy wanted to move her purse from the desk, but stopped. How it managed to became such wet in time of few steps till she entered hotel? After she will put purse away there will be big wet mark, like she made it on purpose, because waited too long and planned little revenge to all that cozy fairy tale.

- I haven't idea that Bex, like you said, will openly tell about that. - Wondered aloud Nancy. Usually her clients lied even to close family, not to mention editors and agents. Everyone wanted to be talented themselves, without necessary help to their weak drafts. They named her

work “light improvement of text.”

- Bex, she told everything, there aren't excuse or chance to avoid it. Auntie Tessa is owner of this hotel, so... I know more than should know regular public. - Clement winked and waited for Nancy's answer. He quickly return to chat between pals, because he knew real reason of her visit and now they all shared this secret.

Nancy decided that he talks too much, but such habit she noticed during exchange letters with Bex, probably something is in the air of woods. Smell of wet leaves, special in the autumn, reminds that winter is almost there, but there is still chance to walk among almost asleep trees and be impressed by bright colors under your boots.

- Yes. Good. Please tell Bex that I am already here and if she needs me... - Started Nancy. - Should I phone her at first?

- Bex already told that better you will have some rest time, today is your free evening. But if you want, drafts are in your room, so you could check them later. Tomorrow Bex will meet you. Our password is “Nook in the wood”, as one word. Be aware of problems with electricity, yesterday was strong wind. If you need something put on recharge, we have generator for such cases. Just say it and we will do everything. Now, if all is clear, I will show your room. - Suggested Clement, he even didn't ask for her documents, probably he trusted Bex about everything and everyone.

- Yes, I would love too. - Agreed Nancy, if it was price that he will shut up for the moment, she is ready to pay it. Definitely it gave her reason to attentively look at him, pleasant

activity, but she is here for work, ghost work. In consideration of that she is still alive, she could had glance or two at him, when he carry her bag on the stairs, which made a little noise when you walk on them.

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Cozy room with dark wood furniture and patchwork style everywhere, reminded to Nancy usual descriptions in Bex's novels, around her was setting. She just retold every detail with accuracy and because of this, story feels so real, even with some weakness in the plot.

- About electricity. Tomorrow will be everything fine, but today you could took bath with candles. We have smell of roses, lime, coffee, mint. It worth it, I promise you. - Clement still talked and Nancy believed that she somewhere already heard all this words. Probably it was policeman, main hero of Bex's novels. He talked too much and suspects lost their confidence and he found out who is the killer such way. - I mean lot of clients said that's amazing experience. I usually didn't take bath with our guests. I mean, I never practiced take a bath. I mean in presence of guests, I mean with guests. I better go, if you need me, here is phone. Have a good bath. Good night, of course, see you.

- I think I get everything. Thank you. - Nancy closed door and for now she received answer why inspector Clem from novels was still single, women just hadn't chance to took part in his conversation.

First thing Nancy checked electricity, second candles with different smells, they were on place, stayed on four corners of the bath. "What will be smell if I light on all of them? Amazing experience? In first novel missing candle proved killer. Yes, I knew that remember draft. Why Bex

didn't use imagination?"

Nancy hoped that at least murders wasn't real and didn't take place in this hotel. On the plate under white napkin was glass of milk and fresh bun with vanilla's smell. Nancy bit of bun and drank milk, in novel poison was in juice, so was nothing to worry about.

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When sat in the bed after bath with candle and read draft, Nancy felt like she was inside a story, just wind was border to believe it was summer afternoon with last weaves of heat in the day. The same crocheted curtains to which paid attention Clem, the same vintage phone and she could recognize fountain pen as main evidence. Bex spend too much time here, but Nancy agreed with writer, this was place to fall in love from first sight. Reading the same pages here was not comparable experience and it had nothing to do with warm blanket and lot of pillows which were on the bed, it made everything softer, even mistakes in plot building.

- I am professional. Just work. - Reminded to herself Nancy. Previous two month she read daily about adventures of inspector Clem and now she saw him. In the book wasn't mentioned that he had such wild dark hair, which you wanted to touch to check soft or not they are. On the other side it was mystery series, not romance novels, but inspector Clem could participate in both genres. And here Nancy was ready to work as ghost writer, few ideas of scenes she already imagined.

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Papers fell on the floor when Nancy put back patchwork blanket, after phone rang usual wake-up song. She used to fell asleep with work on the bed, some drafts worked better then

best sleeping pill. Good that all papers had numbers on the top and bottom of each page, Tess anticipated all options. “Where is printer? Yes, I will ask Clement about this.”

Nancy opened curtains, morning was foggy, but today woman decided it was magical, not scary as yesterday’s evening, when she first time came here. And smell of fresh strong coffee made morning bright.

- Hope Clement makes perfect coffee. What else he could do for guest? We will start with coffee and printer, about everything else will see later. What I should wear?

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Dining room was on the first floor, in fire place already crackled firewood. She could used to wake up in this house. Nancy choose long tweed red and black plaid skirt and coffee with milk colour turtle neck sweater with red shawl, cozy and creative as she believed.

- Morning. I am Gerald, painter. Nice to meet you. In such early morning usually Tess’ coffee is only for me. - Man stood up and introduced himself, when Nancy entered dining room. He wore black and red plaid shirt above which was vest with lot of little pockets, it reminded about fishing then painting activity more. He had short gray hair, from painter Nancy waited long hair with not creative mess.

- Nancy. Nice to meet you too. I use to work in the morning and coffee is necessary fuel. - Nancy looked around, everything was ready for breakfast, but again seemed that no one from hotel’s stuff is present there, she wasn’t only ghost here. Whole work could be made by little smiling fairies with wings, which were at paintings on the walls.

- I plan to stay here till first snow. I checked weather forecast, they made encouraging promises. Plain air, such amazing view. And I want to catch changes from fall to winter, you know it's just a moment and leaves are lost under white cover. - Gerald checked his scarf and bag on other chair everything was ready to painting expedition, even little umbrella. - What about you?

Nancy stopped to count his coffee cups, it was third, third since she came. At each of two plates with buns which were in front of him left only one bun, and at her plate was prepared five of them with sesame seeds on top.

- Me? I am editor, I help writers to improve their work. - Answered Nancy and pured herself second cup. Usually it was story which prefer authors when worked with ghost writer. Because of this it was remote work, everything by e-mails, rare personal meetings. No matter what Bex told to her friend and friend's nephew, but public need to believe in legend. - I am here to work with Bex.

- Bex? - Repeated Gerald. - She will stay in hotel? Good, I am only one, was only one guest here, till your visit. I will talk with Tess about that later.

- But Bex... - Started Nancy, when put cup back on the table.

- Good morning, Nancy. - Entered Clement, he had wet hair, probably few moments ago from shower. Then all work was done by his aunt, Nancy was a little disappointed, Clement wasn't perfect on every experience level. In his hand was paper bag with warm buns. - Tess

prepared to you, with cherry filling, not only inspiration as food. More coffee, Gerald?

- Thank you Clement, but I need some reason to walk away from this warm room.

Have a nice day, Nancy. - Gerald put warm jacket on and shook hands with Clement.

Gerald took all his belongings and walked away, Nancy was not surprised that one of the French windows was also door behind which started shorter road to wood. In novel it was possible escape for victim, but murderer knew this place also perfectly and waited behind the tree.

- Morning, Clement. Coffee is wonderful, send compliments to your aunt. Could I talk to Bex now? Gerald said that he didn't see her yet. - Nancy thought that probably Bex wasn't real name, which was usual for writers. But painter said that he is single client here.

Looks like whole Clement's attention was concentrated at painter's figure in bright yellow jacket, who turned on the left and now was out of sight.

- Yes, Gerald was right. Bex again has terrible headache and stays in her room. She asked to apologize for her, if you want to talk about novel... - Today Clement opened less information during conversation and looks at Nancy as in doubt, if could he really trust her to say more. At the morning light she was the same lovely, as yesterday in the evening, but it couldn't be proper reason to told her everything.

- I think, it's all right. Honestly, I didn't finish read new revision. Bex added new scenes which wasn't in previous draft and I need more time to make notes. Also I will need a printer to finish my version. - Added Nancy. She wanted to underline that already done something and

worth money which paid to her Bex.

- Sure, in few moments I will bring it in your room. I just forgot yesterday. You need to work. You are here to work. - Stressed Clement, or Nancy was such used to mark every line in conversation that couldn't accept simple "said".

- Thank you. Bex, when she will be better, I will wait to talk with her. - Nancy smiled and put back on shoulders shawl. - Sorry, I need to work. I will wait printer.

- Clement, dear, you are here? - Not young woman, in blue fluffy crochet vest on the grey dress with long sleeves, entered dining room. Her red hair remind firewood in the fireplace, she moved quickly, talked not aloud, as habit to not disturb hotel's guests.

- Aunt Tessa. It's Nancy, Bex's ghost. - Introduced Clement women.

- Nice to meet you. I read all your changes to draft, you keep all details, but everything looks much fresher. - Started Tess, during shaking Nancy's hand. Probably it was usual greeting, daily greeting, better than crazy hugs of her neighbor's friends. With Tess in the room entered even stronger smell of fresh bakery.

- Bex hasn't secrets from auntie, especially in writing. They like one. Yes, aunt Tess.

- Said Clement, attentively looked at aunt. Tess completely ignored him and looked at Nancy, with curiosity of person, who makes judgments based on personal experience.

- Nice to hear that, hope she will be well. See you later. Was pleasure to meet you,

Tess, hotel is like in novel. I wanted to say that is cozy and warm, like depicted Bex. - Nancy walked away from dining room. - I still wait for printer.

- Sure. In the moment. - Waved Clement and looked how Nancy hastily walked on steps to her room.

- What did you say to her? - Heard Nancy Tessa's voice when closing door. She didn't want to eavesdrop whole conversation, she already recognize all their lines. In novel it was "morning quarrels about nothing".

Nancy switched on sound of ocean in headphones and returned to revision.

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- Nothing in particular. - Whispered Clement.

- She closed door, don't whisper. Here is difficult to heard something, I tried. What she told about novel? Did she like it? What she suggested about scene of chasing squirrel? - Didn't stop with questions Tessa. - She didn't eat all buns. Did she tell something against that?

- She send you compliments about bakery. And Tess, when you will used to that not every person eat twelve buns during breakfast as Gerald. And with novel... Don't you want to ask her yourself and tell truth? Now was good enough opportunity. Still you could knock to the door and explain. Checking if everything fine with printer is good start of conversation. - Suggested Clement.

- Which conversation? - Asked Tessa, when put on tray cups.

- To tell all about Bex, your best friend. Even Gerald doesn't know. How long you will hide secret? - Asked Clement.

- I am not ready. I have no idea if ever will be ready. And I disagree with you that this is such necessary. - Tessa checked phone. - I need to go, today is market day, remember. Where are my car's keys?

- You know better. Sorry, auntie, but I need to check electricity, yesterday again tree fell in the wood, I need to check everything after bring printer. Today you will manage without me at market. If you excuse me, I need to go now. Hope Bex will feel good enough to meet Nancy. - Clement hurriedly smacked aunt in chin and took black jacket from hanger, instantly walked away from dining room. - I remember about printer, but it won't work without electricity.

- Hope Bex will feel good enough to meet Nancy. - Repeated Tess words of nephew.

- You said that such way as Bex didn't want to, she just can't. For now I hope so, just for now.

Tess took from the chair knitted glove, which forget Gerald and tenderly put it on table, if he remember and will return.

- Market won't wait for me. Where Clement put his keys? I will use his car, he hasn't right to talk to me such way.

Tess one more time touched glove and walked from dining room with tray.

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Till late evening, Nancy hadn't chance to see Bex, Clement brought printed draft himself to writer. When she returned in the room, after unexpectedly good conversation during too many dishes dinner, long letter from writer waited for her on the table. Bex missed such character as Gerald, he shined all evening and probably Tess liked it very much, if prepared him daily different dishes.

Real handwritten letter, like to every drafts Bex added this, even if she scanned all pages. It was something unusual, out of this age. That was one of the reasons why Nancy agreed to stay in hotel and work in person with this writer. Ghost was tired of all writers, especially teenagers prodigies, who comment her writing putting smiles or gifs after each scene. They should remember that still write a novel, not put messages on-line. No matter that on computer, but Bex's letters Nancy read with cup of chocolate in hand, not knowing what enjoy more – beverage or text. At beginning suggested to Bex write novel, like letters, but writer couldn't switch that styles. Such letters were main inspiration for Nancy to find proper voice for this novels.

“Dear Nancy, I feel terribly sorry that we didn't talk yet, hope it will change soon...”
Started letter and than were lot of new ideas how could be changed draft and after them plot in the whole.

- She didn't need ghost writer, she need person who will agree to all ideas, not help somehow finish the book. - Nancy started research of new places on map which mentioned Bex, after she created little pyramid from pillows on the wide bed.

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- Where is Nancy? - Asked Clement his aunt next morning. He just returned from morning run in the wood and met Gerald on his way from hotel, instead of boutonniere painter placed gloves in his jacket's pocket.

- She went to walk in the wood. Such sunny weather. Call her if necessary. - Aunt quickly changed clothes on the table.

- You didn't tell her. - Clement stopped to unzip his jacket.

- What about, dear? - Asked Tessa, when put back on table vase with flowers.

- Bex can't had headache all the time. - Clement hold next vase from table.

- Agree. And this vase also, thank you. - Tessa didn't look at nephew. - You were such helpful, as always.

- What exactly did you tell her?

- Don't be nervous. Everything will be fine, Clement. - Aunt put away not existed crumbs from table.

- Aunt.

- Fine. - Tessa checked big safety pin on her pink shawl and looked at Clement's eyes. - I said that Bex felt better and decided to have a walk in the wood, today is lovely weather. Any rains till evening, Gerald checked in the morning. You was right.

- Aunt, you need to stop it. If Nancy asks Gerald about Bex? What will be? - Asked Clement.

- He will say that didn't see her and this will be truth. And he is not ready to meet Bex. Bex is not ready to tell him. - Tess started to rearrange water bottles on the table. - I need more leaves to add to the flowers. What do you think?

- Where is she? - Clement zipped his jacket.

- I told her about old barn. She won't be lost, and she updated map, she showed me. - Tess didn't like when nephew was right and wanted to stop this talk.

- Aunt, you need make borders in your life between reality and fiction. I will find her and you both talk, really talk. - Clement quickly walked from dining room.

- Such interest in my career have only one explanation, Nancy. I understand that. - Tess smiled and opened table drawer and put papers on table. - What was her morning suggestions to scene with squirrel?

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Tessa gave clear explanation and without problem Nancy found old barn, even didn't

check hotel's map. This time she wore black jacket and scarf to feel comfortable walking in the wood.

- Hello? Anybody here? Bex? - Nancy opened big door to the barn. There still were hay and ladder to the second floor, where should be window from where inspector Clem had good view and waited for suspect.

- Hello? - Asked once again Nancy, when heard some noise. Ladder was strong enough and Nancy quickly was on the second floor.

Window was on place, Nancy liked this experience, to be in novel which was still in draft, it made deep connection with the text and she made few photos from window as part of research.

- Hello? - Nancy turned to noise. - Hey! - Something fell on her head from above. Woman headed up and saw beak at which sat squirrel, sun from window made everything bright.

- I know you. You are from novel, scene of your chasing is hilarious, made it today at morning, left almost full untouched. Poor inspector Clem, but he still didn't tame you. - Smiled Nancy. Squirrel didn't move, when Nancy made pictures of shadows on the walls which create squirrel's silhouette.

Humid hey smelled heady, not surprisingly that inspector fell asleep and almost lost whole case. Nancy touched scorn bed where main hero spend more than twenty pages.

- Stay here. I didn't tell inspector a word. - Nancy waved to squirrel and started to went down on ladder, probably her boots wasn't perfect for that, but she managed to climb there at first.

- Careful! - Warned Clement from below. His voice was calm, but Nancy shivered from surprise.

- I'm fine. - Nancy nod and ladder moved and with bunch of hay she fell to the deep hey which was on the ground.

- Are you all right? - Clement quickly threw back hey from Nancy. He could phone her, but when went to the wood, from beginning knew where to find. He couldn't predict that she will climb to the second floor and wanted to prevent her from that, ladder was old or like Tess called it "rustic".

- I'm really fine. - Nancy was scared to move, but wanted to not look such stupid. In romance novels usually it was perfect scene for first kiss, but Clement was busy with hey. - Nothing to worry.

- Good, then you could let go ladder, I think it's not necessary now. - Clement easy took ladder from Nancy's hands and put it on place. - Could you stand up?

- I haven't choice. - "I haven't wish" wanted to say Nancy, but changed her mind and put her scarf from shoulders.

- I will help.

Clement tenderly helped Nancy to stand up and hold her in his hands. When Nancy worked on manuscripts in such moments she usually shout to character – “What do you wait? Some sign? Music from heaven? Grab her and put back to hey, she is ready!” She knew that she had some straw in her stranded hair and Clement could start with helping to remove this.

- Everything is fine? - Asked Clement. - Should I call ambulance? Can you walk?

- I try. - Nancy was ready to run away from embarrassment, she want to make effect, but not in such way. Clement looked at her and checked if everything is fine.

- Not bad, but I will help you. - Clement proposed to her hand.

Nancy quickly turned around and kissed him in lips.

- I mean, thank you. - As professional in character’s arcs, she couldn’t miss such moment.

Clement tightly snuggled Nancy to himself and kissed her back. Straw in her hair make her look ridiculous, but he believed it’s sweet.

- You are welcome. - Added he.

- I saw a squirrel. - Nancy decided it will be better to change subject for now to

neutral theme. It wasn't in her rules, as explanation she had reason that fell and behaved bizarre.

- Is she there? - Asked Clement and looked at the ladder. He understand that Nancy already climbed ladder and when he came she returned back.

- Was. Was there, but now she is gone, I am more than sure. So it was real story? -
Asked Nancy.

- Aunt Tess' favorite. - Nodded Clement.

- Bex knew about you so much. Doesn't it scare you? Or it makes you proud? -

Nancy was curious to talk with main hero of novel, attractive main hero of novel, whom she kissed and he kissed her in return.

- About that, better if we return back to hotel. - Clement was again serious and
Nancy was disappointed that romantic mood was already lost.

All way back to hotel they were quiet and Clement even didn't try to hold Nancy's hand. Woman felt that scene was against whole rules of romance novel, but it was life. And Bex wrote mystery stories, not romance.

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- You could told me! - When Clement and Nancy entered in dining room they heard
Gerald's voice.

- I told you. - Answered Tess. She decided to tell everything to Gerald, she behaved strange when tried to hide from him draft and run to her room, no matter that he said that didn't need explanations. And she wanted to explain him, as attempt to stop him from future packing and moving from her hotel.

- For how long do you... - Gerald stopped, when noticed Clement and Nancy. - Clement, did you knew? Why I ask, I see the answer written on your face. How could you, Tess?

- I made it for you. Surprise. Some kind of. That you could be proud of me. I didn't finish, I still work. So I wanted to look more interesting for you. - Tess didn't care that have witnesses for her quarrel, she already make her life too complicated with all that hiding.

- Me? - Repeated Gerald.

- Because of you. - Answered owner of hotel.

- Better I will go to my room, sorry everyone. - Suggested Nancy. - Tell that to Bex, I still wait to meet her.

- She is already here. - Gerald pointed to Tess.

- What's going on here? - Asked Nancy.

- I will make strong tea and aunt Tess has something to tell you both. - Clement put his jacked on the back of chair.

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- When Gerald was here first time, I was impressed by his works. He is such creative person. - Aunt Tess gently touched handle of teacup. - And I was owner of the hotel. Nothing more. I never visited places about which he told stories and made paintings. He quoted literature and talked about art, I was impressed. When he invited me to his art show and I saw how he painted all that I saw daily, I was overwhelmed. I didn't see this beauty, I walked in the wood day after day and recognized every place where Gerald painted, it was like see all at first. You saw his works, do you, Nancy?

- Yes. They are great. - Honestly agreed Nancy. She saw paintings which was in the corner of the dining room and even made photos, when no one watched.

- It was four years ago. - Continued Tess. - I started to write about every picture, every place, but later I remembered stories connected with that wood and inspector Clem was invented.

- Why inspector? - Asked Nancy.

- I was against work in hotel business, want to be inspector. Worked in police. But fate was different and I returned here. - Quickly finished Clement.

- Inquiry? - With support asked Gerald.

Clement looked at the window instead of answer.

- No. No. Affair with main suspect, it was in second novel. She used you. I mean, used inspector Clem. Sorry. - Interrupted Nancy.

- Yes. I had sins and now my aunt Tess, who called herself Bex as writer, write about them. - Mumbled Clement.

- You wanted to impress me with book? Why hide? - Not paying attention to new information asked Gerald. Nancy remembered about dedication “to my dearest G”, but this time don’t mentioned this aloud, it wasn’t her story after all.

- I wanted to be also creative. To have something to talk with you about, share my experience. - Nodded Tess.

- I want to read this draft, now. - Said Gerald.

- Come with me. I still hide it in my room. We will talk later, Nancy.

Tess and Gerald walked away from dinning room, smiling like teenagers.

- Nancy, about old barn... - Started Clement, when turned his face to her.

- Yes. - Nancy was ready to listen.

- Today you will be busy with our aspiring writer, she will return quickly, I am sure.

But tomorrow, we could also visit that place. - Finished Clement.

- What for? - Asked Nancy.

- What for? How about catch this squirrel? As one of possible scenario.

- Sound interesting. Even more than interesting. But I am not sure that will be on your side in this case. Squirrel is innocent, it's her territory. I have photos. You are intruder. -

Suggested Nancy.

- What I heard? She still was there, when we were there. I knew it. You support wrongdoer. I have evidences against her, lot of evidences. - Clement tried not to laugh.

- And where are evidences? - Asked Nancy, coming few steps closer to him.

- You won't believe, but they all are in the old barn.

- I didn't notice. - Said Nancy.

- Really? In such circumstances we need to return to crime scene immediately. -

Clement made two steps and now they were face to face.

- Immediately? - Repeated Nancy.

- If you didn't mind and haven't urgent plans for now. - Started Clement.

- I will check my calendar. - Nancy looked at her phone.

- I heard aunt's steps, if you want return to draft, please. - Clement smiled with eyes.

- I think crime scene is in priority. I checked, not busy. - Winked Nancy.

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- And in scene with... - Tess entered in the dining room. - Where? Hope Clement listened to me and will show to Nancy setting of the novel. Gerald wanted to not be interrupted during reading.

Tessa came to the window and saw walking away from hotel Clement and Nancy.

- Good boy, they went to the old barn. Knowing real details helps in writing, for sure. Hope snow will be only tomorrow and Gerald will finish reading draft till start new painting.

Tess smiles and returned to reading next novel's draft. Probably she found perfect reason for Nancy to stay till Christmas. She believed in nephew's charm.

THE END.

November 2018