

PART 4.

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7 years later
The vow

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Friday night's programme promised to be exciting. They wouldn't have missed Antony Costa's birthday party for the world – he was turning 39 that very day. As every year, Tony celebrated in the presence of his closest friends and family. Hayden had always been invited, and if he happened to be in London, he made sure to go and give his birthday greetings to his good friend. This was, however, the first occasion he would be making an appearance with his fiancée. Lana had also come to genuinely like the Costas, and the feeling was mutual. Time spent with Tony and his wife had always been relaxed, funny and somewhat noisy, which pleasantly reminded Lana of her own family. They both looked forward to the evening. Since Hayden had a lot to do that day, he couldn't make himself free too early. For this reason, they agreed that she should come and meet him at the office building,

and they would move on to the restaurant together.

Hayden lay back exhausted, folded down his laptop and glanced at his watch. He had half an hour until Lana arrived. He got up from the leather armchair, and stretched out his stiff limbs. Then he took his jacket from the back of the armchair and threw it over his shoulder. He thought he would pop downstairs to his apartment, have a shower and get changed. He thought that if he was fast enough, he would make it back before she got there, since he only had to take the lift down a few flights of stairs and then back up. He told Giselle that he would be back in thirty minutes at the very most, but if his fiancée was to arrive before him, she was to be led into his office.

In less than thirty minutes, he returned all refreshed, and as always before a date with Lana, feeling quite excited. Giselle wasn't behind her desk. Hayden opened the office door and peeked inside. There was nobody there; obviously, Lana had not arrived yet. He found a short note from Giselle on the desk about a missed call. He was warm, so he undid the top button on his shirt. He stepped towards one of the filing cabinets and began to look for something. He soon found the folder that had been mentioned in his secretary's note. Wrinkling his forehead, he began to leaf through it, and then took out an A4 sheet. Reading it, he walked into the bathroom, which opened from his office. He was still in there when he heard the office door open and somebody step inside.

"He'll be here soon. Just a question of a few minutes," he heard Giselle say.

The response thanks, Giselle must have come from Lana.

"No, mum. Sorry, I wasn't talking to you, it was for somebody else," came the words right after, from which Hayden concluded that she must have been on the phone while stepping into the office.

Hayden smiled to himself when he realised the comic nature of the situation. Giselle couldn't have seen him arriving, so she had no idea he was already here. This meant, Lana also thought she was alone in the office. He began to think how he could use the situation to play a joke on her. He first thought he would jump out of the bathroom with a big scream and frighten her, but immediately discarded the crazy idea. Then he thought to call her on her mobile and ask her to go into the bathroom, where he would be waiting. He definitely preferred this one, the only problem being that Lana had already been on the phone. He decided to wait a while, sitting on the lid of the toilet with the mobile in his hand. The door was ajar, so he was able to decipher parts of the conversation. It had become obvious by then that Katie was at the other end of the line.

"No, no, by no means, mother! You are sweet, but there's no need for that. I'll take care of that. Right enough, I don't know when, but I'll arrange it."

"..."

"Oh, we're not even close. I have no clue, and I'm pretty sure he has no idea either."

"..."

"Yes, Pamela's already called me about that. We're getting there, although a bit slowly."

"..."

"I don't want to bother him with that. You know how it is, men and wedding preparations..." she laughed, and Hayden began to listen more attentively. "I already get the feeling I give him too much work to do."

“ ... ”

“No, never.”

“ ... ”

“That’s clear, but I never realised it would be so much trouble. And we have to adapt ourselves to so many people. Sometimes I feel like I can no longer keep my head above water. And I’m pretty sure I’ll forget something very important, and it will all turn into a disaster.”

“ ... ”

“No, we’ll have to cancel that date. Rob will not make it back from Holland by then.”

“ ... ”

“Unfortunately, that won’t work either. Antony Costa, Hayden’s witness will be participating in some doctors’ conference in Copenhagen that week.”

“ ... ”

“Don’t even remind me. I know very well, mum. I’m not complaining. I’ve got no reason to.”

“ ... ”

“He’s great. The best. I can’t wait! Yes, yes, I know too.”

“ ... ”

“He left it up to me. Yes ...” she continued, heaving a big sigh. “Sometimes I wonder why we don’t just pack a suitcase and head for Vegas. Just the two of us. We could be married tomorrow evening. And everything would be sorted in a minute.”

“ ... ”

“Of course, but this is what we both want, after all. The ‘how’ is not important. At least, not for me. And I think he would agree...,” she said, her voice becoming insecure for a moment.

By this time, he had stood up, and leaning his forehead against the door, he was listening with every nerve in his body.

“Okay. Vegas might not represent the style of either of us,” she laughed, slightly bitterly. “But you know what I mean, mum! I don’t want a big fuss. Sometimes, just sometimes, I think that with the history we’ve got...”

“ ... ”

“No, I’m not worried about you, guys. I know you’d understand, but I still can’t do it. Not anymore. We’re in the middle of it now, and I’d hate to make trouble again. Hayden’s also very busy making arrangements. I don’t want to make it look like I’m not contented.”

“ ... ”

“That’s right. And it wouldn’t even be true. I still do, more and more,” she spoke, sighing into the

phone dreamily. "I wish we were there now."

"..."

"I know. Things will work out fine. I'm just a bit nervous, that's all."

"..."

"I might bring it up. Okay then, speak to you next week."

"..."

"Me too. I will tell him. Bye, mum."

Lana ended the call and looked at her watch. He should be here by now. We'll be late! - she noted. She stood in front of the glass window and stared at the traffic when a knock came to the door, and Giselle entered. She handed her a note from Hayden. He apologised to her for being late, and wanted to see her in five minutes in the downstairs hall. Lana thanked Giselle for her help, and started for the lift.

In the meantime, Hayden was sitting in the bathroom, staring at the wall. He could hardly believe what he had just heard. It had never occurred to him that she, just like he himself, had doubts about the wedding arrangements. Lana had no idea that someone had been eavesdropping on her phone conversation, and it was obvious that she had been speaking her mind to Katie, that she had been sharing her real feelings. Although Hayden felt a bit ashamed of the manner in which he had come to know all this, it was also true that he had not sought to end up in this situation. It was through coincidence that he had come to know something that Lana would never have shared with him out of tactfulness and care.

She is behaving in exactly the same way as me. We are behaving in the same way - he thought indignantly, tapping his forehead against the bathroom door a few times. She doesn't want to hurt me with this. She would never admit that this whole fuss, this preparation is driving her crazy too. She'd also prefer to run away, and just go off somewhere together with me.

"This is madness!" he shouted out, digging into his hair with his fingers.

It upset him why they were still so insecure about addressing unpleasant issues. He himself would never have mentioned what a burden the big wedding was on him. He had thought it was making Lana happy, and to him, that was more important than anything else. Suddenly, he made a big decision. He had already sent a message to Giselle with a request to lure Lana downstairs, into the hall. After it had become clear to him what the phone call had been about, it was too late. He would've found it so unworthy to come out of his hiding place and confess that he had heard everything. In retrospect, he was happy he had managed to keep his presence a secret, as it had helped him to cook up a very daring plan.

He ceremoniously promised himself that this would be the last occasion he would not be completely honest with Lana, then, with a pensive smile on his face, he left the office room. As he exited, he was met by Giselle's shocked face. She stared at him with large eyes and was about to say something when Hayden, lifting his finger to his mouth, signalled her to be quiet.

"It's all right. Thank you, Giselle!" he said, and rushed to the lift. In a hurry, he turned back once more, and remarked, "I'll explain everything later."

Giselle gave a confused nod, then shook her head, and as a sign of cluelessness, exhaled loudly.

Hayden's brain was working feverishly hard both while he waited, and while descending inside the lift. He drummed excitedly away on the wall. He was flooded by many ideas that he wanted to realise straight away. He could hardly control himself, being so desperate to act. A mixture of surprise, joy and determination was brewing inside him with such power that as he reached the hall, he had to pause for a moment to pull himself together before meeting Lana. He leaned against the wall and breathed in and out a few times. He convinced himself that he should seem calm, and that he was to have a good time at the Costas'. There was nothing to be done that day anyway, and he really didn't want her to assume there was anything bad behind his excitement. Finally, the joy of his decision and relief got the better of him. He stepped up to Lana, smoothed her hair to the side, and kissed her shoulder from behind.

"Sorry I'm late, darling!" he whispered into her ear.

She turned, and on looking at him, a charming smile appeared on her face. She hugged Hayden's neck, and he, not caring much who saw them, picked her up and spun her around.

"Well, if you ask like this, there is a good chance I'll forgive you," she said laughing, and didn't even try to unfold from his embrace. "Is everything okay?" she asked, studying him, as her toes reached the ground.

"Everything is perfect," he responded with conviction, then taking her by the hand, led her towards the exit. "I think we'd better hurry, dear. I don't want to be late, and we still have to pop into Harrods for Tony's gift."

On the following Monday, Giselle did come to know what the issue had been about. And she wasn't terribly surprised. Extravagant behaviour and unconventional problem solving had always been typical of her boss. In the course of the next few days, Hayden was in great need of her excellent organisational skills. During the week, another two people had been initiated into the secret. One was Tony Costa, the other Pamela Masters. The one who definitely had no clue, and to whom absolutely none of the details had been revealed, was Lana. She spent the whole week at the Chancellery, and in the evenings, she busied herself trying to make arrangements for the wedding. The latter gave her a very hard time, as the otherwise very helpful Pamela had strangely never been available to meet her. Every time they spoke, Lana had the feeling that she was always trying to shake her off, albeit very kindly. For this reason, arrangements in relation to the dress were also stuck that week. Lana resigned herself to the fact that it was up to her, and only her, to do the preparation work, and some nights she spent designing the invitation card and making a seating plan. She hardly ever saw Hayden, and that also made her feel bad. They were constantly in touch over the phone, but when they met, he never had a lot of time to stay. He treated her very gently and kindly, and kept apologising for not being able to spend time with her that week. Lana was naturally aware of his irregular work hours, and that sometimes he would unexpectedly have to travel somewhere on business. She never even thought of complaining about that. Hayden had always taken his leading position very seriously, even though lately his priorities had significantly changed. He often called Lana on the phone and promised her that as soon as his crazy week - as he called it - would end, everything would be different. He promised in advance that whatever it took, they would spend the weekend together. He made sure Lana remembered not to plan anything for the weekend, as on Saturday morning they were to leave for Cornwall, to the Ravensdale family home. Lana, of course, was happy to agree, and couldn't wait until the weekend. The only benefit of Hayden's absence was that she was able to spend two undisturbed evenings with Emmy. She'd had a few days' break at school, so came over to see Lana midweek, and slept at her place. They had a pyjama party,

and talked into the small hours. Lana gave Emmy a few pieces of advice regarding a school composition, and the next day they went to the hairdresser's together for a quick fix.

One day a strange, inexplicable feeling came over Lana while she was at work. She and Dave Simmons had been in Masters' office, discussing something about the Livingstone vs Livingstone case when she came to notice that Thom Masters had been staring at her in a very unusual way. He was studying her with a furrowed brow, only averting his gaze when Lana openly looked into his eyes. She couldn't make head nor tail of this, and later asked Dave if he had also noticed something strange about their boss' behaviour. Since he had said no, she soon put it behind her, and never thought about it again.

On Friday night, she packed a few things she might need for the weekend's outing into a sports bag, and then worked quite late at the dinner table on a few work-related letters. Hayden called her at about ten later that evening; Lana had the feeling he was a bit more excited than usual. This he simply explained as tiredness, and stressed repeatedly how much he was looking forward to the next day when they were to meet. Lana felt the same, and after she had finally folded down her laptop at about 11, she collapsed into her bed, dead tired. She didn't sleep well. She tossed and turned, woke up often, and read the numbers on the digital clock too many times, waiting for the night to pass.

Near morning, she finally fell into a deep sleep from which she was awoken by the noise of the buzzer. She pushed herself onto her elbows feeling light-headed. It took her a few seconds to realise the shrill sound was not part of a dream, but had come from the door. In a split second, her brain had cleared, and with a jump, she was on her feet. She realised with alarm that she had slept in, and that the person pressing the buzzer could only be Hayden. He waited for a while, but since nobody answered, he put the key into the lock. Lana ran to the door in a rush. On her way, she took a quick glance at her messy self in the wall mirror, and made an immediate decision. She caught the door handle just in time to push the door back with a strong move.

"Hello, dear! Wait a sec, please."

"Lana?" came his worried voice from outside. "Is everything all right?"

"Give me a minute, please. I've slept in. You've just woken me with the buzzer. I look horrible, I don't want you to see me like this," she pleaded, leaning her forehead against the door.

"Are you kidding? I don't believe that. You, looking horrible? Let me in, Princess. I want to see you," he said jokingly, and began to push the door in.

"This is not funny at all, and if you were a woman, which luckily you're not, you'd know what I'm talking about. I only need a minute. Promise me that if I do let you in, you will be a good boy and won't sneak a look at me in the bathroom!"

"Don't do this to me, my love. Let me in! Do you enjoy torturing me? I've missed you like crazy!" Hayden went on.

"Promise me," she said stubbornly, at which he heaved a big sigh.

"I promise. Can I come in now?"

"Okay," Lana said and let go of the door, immediately making her way for the bathroom.

Hayden stuck his head in through the little opening and looked around. There was nobody in sight.

"Come in, and make yourself comfortable. I'll be with you in a sec," came her voice from the bathroom, at which he shook his head with a smile and went into the kitchen.

He put the freshly baked rolls, which he had brought from the bakery, onto a plate, and began to look for juice in the fridge. He also took out some butter and jam, and placed the improvised breakfast onto the kitchen table.

Lana soon appeared in the door, all dressed and glamorous. She hugged Hayden's neck from behind. He was sitting on a chair, and as promised, had been waiting for her obediently.

"At last, at last, at last!" he sighed, pulling her onto his lap, at once kissing her with an unexpected vehemence. He squeezed her in his arms tightly, as if he was scared she might take flight like a bird and disappear through the window. He wanted to admire and kiss her, and caress and cherish her at the same time, though he had the feeling that none of these would express the overflowing pleasure that her presence and touch generated in him. He desired to put into words the feelings that made his heart pound so crazily; but as soon as he looked into Lana's eyes, glittering with tears, he gave up. He realised that he wouldn't be able to find the words worthy to describe how he felt. Instead, he whispered onto Lana's lips "I really want to tell you... I wish I could!"

She gently ran her finger along his lips, and shook her head, eyes closed.

"There is no need. I know anyway," she breathed quietly. "I know from the way you look at me and how you touch me. I can tell everything from the tone of your voice and the changing of your breathing. And believe me; everything they say makes me unspeakably happy."

"My life," he whispered into her ear, and since Lana's confession had convinced him that he was progressing in the right direction, he continued his caress from exactly where he had stopped it before.

During breakfast, Lana was once again impressed by the attentiveness with which Hayden had set the table. She subconsciously read the message of the plates positioned unusually close together, and the tips of the folded napkins, touching. These signs said I want you near me. Much closer than others would think it right or logical, even if they can't understand the reason behind this.

It was about ten when they finally left the apartment and started for Cornwall. Lana had the impression as she tossed her sports bag into his boot, that Hayden had brought a strangely big sized bag with him. When they were going somewhere, she was usually the one who had more to pack for the road. She couldn't help making a funny comment, furrowing her brow.

"How many days did you pack for? Don't they say it's women who tend to get carried away with packing?"

He froze for a moment and blinked at Lana with embarrassment. It looked like he was lost for words and didn't know how to respond. She found his reaction quite strange, and didn't know what to make of the puzzled expression on his face. She slammed the lid of the boot down, and ran round to him. Sweetly, she embraced his waist, at which Hayden finally recomposed himself. He lifted his hands in the air dramatically, and remarked that everybody had their own little whims. As for him, he insisted on bringing a safe number of underwear items, and regarding shirts and sweaters, even a satisfactory selection of colours. Lana had a good laugh at that, and then allowed Hayden to help her into the car with a courteous gesture, and to shut the door behind her. Their eyes were still linked while he walked around the front of the car to get to the driver's seat on the other side. Later, as they got into the flow of traffic, he still looked to the side more often than to the front, and Lana,

shaking her head, would grab his chin and playfully direct it back towards the road ahead.

There was a long way in front of them, but they made the most of every single moment of the four-hour car-drive. Hayden deliberately took the more picturesque route instead of the faster but less personal motorway. He thought Lana would prefer it that way, and he was right. They only stopped once midway, not far from Stonehenge. They were even able to make out from the car windows the outlines of the five-thousand-year-old stone construction erected on Salisbury Plain. They had lunch in a small inn by the motorway, then continued on west. Lana noticed that Hayden was talking quite a lot, and in an unusually discursive style. He told her how many times he had covered this route in his life. Sometimes happily, sometimes sadly or indifferently, but never in the way that he did that day. The reason was that it was the first occasion that Lana was sitting next to him, led by a common aim towards Cornwall. Then, all of a sudden he went quiet, became deeply absorbed in his thoughts, and it was only the ringtone of his mobile that brought him back to the present. During the journey, he made a few calls, which, in itself, didn't surprise Lana; she only wondered about the short, brief sentences he exchanged with the caller, whoever it was. When he finished, he would look at her apologetically and ask for her patience, although she didn't seem at all impatient. Although she didn't ask him, he still promised her with much zeal that in the evening things would be different, and nobody would disturb them. Lana only smiled and assured him once again that he shouldn't worry, that she wasn't bothered at all. The truth was he seemed much more vexed about the calls than Lana was. Their fingers were locked together as they drove past endless fields, farms and settlements. At times, there was nothing to block their view, so they could admire the scenery for many miles of flat, green pastureland. Every now and then, they progressed down shady lanes, so thickly lined by trees that they could only see a thin, blue stripe of sky above their head.

Of course, the issue of the wedding came up as well. With a sneaky smile, Hayden asked how things were, what she had managed to do that week. He hoped she didn't resent that he hadn't been available to help her over the last few days, but he had had so many things to do which could not be delayed that, with his schedule, he had to give priority to those tasks. Lana only resented it a little. What gave her a hard time in reality was his absence, not the fact that he hadn't taken part in the wedding preparations during the week. Since she herself found it all a big hassle, she couldn't hold it against him if he wanted to stay out of it. She felt Hayden's love and dedication in such an intensive and lively way that there wasn't a spark of doubt in her heart. She was dying to become married to him, and since the same desire was coming through his every word, she wasn't too worried about the date. Of course, it was also true that every time they met the air between them was charged with excitement. It became more and more evident that the sensual desire they had been concealing for many months was soon to break through, whether the wedding took place or not. Once again, she had the uncanny feeling that there was some restlessness in Hayden's voice and smile when he asked her about the wedding. He pulled her fingers eagerly to his mouth and kissed them one by one, which made her forget all her unpleasant thoughts. Instead, she told him she was making good progress with the seating plan and that the invitation cards would soon be ready. The final date had, of course, been left blank, but as soon as they had agreed upon the date, there would be nothing left to do but send them out. She didn't mention, however, that due to Pamela's busy schedule, she hadn't made any progress with the dress.

"Well, believe it or not, I haven't been idle either," said Hayden, and winked slyly.

Pulling up her eyebrows, Lana looked at him inquisitively.

"Really? Talk to me."

"Hmm, for example I've got the clothes that I'm going to wear, and my shoes and tie. And lots of

tiny details which are very important from the aspect of the final result," he added, lifting his forefinger in seriousness.

Lana at first laughed, but she still had the sinking feeling that he wasn't joking at all, and that he had indeed arranged a few things. He joked around a bit more about the wedding clothes, and started a short argument whether or not the strict secrecy regarding the bridal dress applied to the groom's suit as well.

Lana estimated the distance to their destination about one to one and a half hours when Hayden became serious and abruptly changed the subject.

"What if we went to Tintagel? I thought it might be a good idea, now that we are so close. Have you been there before? It's an amazing place."

"Tintagel? You mean to see the castle ruins?" she asked in surprise.

"Yes, the castle ruins and that little isle. It's really worth a visit; the surroundings are beautiful. Are you familiar with them?" he asked again, with increasing worry in his voice.

Lana looked at him with surprise and became puzzled why his chest was lifting and sinking so quickly, and why the artery on his neck was pulsing so wildly. She turned to face the road again, but didn't fail to notice Hayden's hand clutching the steering wheel with insane strength.

"Ehm, yes. Or, no, not really. I've never been there, but I've read about it and seen some photos."

She went quiet at which point he turned towards her with tense expectation. His gaze was quizzical; his eyes lifted questioningly. He was obviously waiting for a response. Lana didn't keep him waiting.

"It's a grand idea. I'd love to go there. I've heard that according to legend, it was King Arthur's birthplace. Are we really so close to it?" Her eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Maybe an hour away," Hayden replied slowly.

He closed his eyes for a moment, and exhaled with visible relief. His tense facial muscles had relaxed, as did his grip on the steering wheel. He had secretly hoped that Lana would have nothing against the spur-of-the-moment change of plan. Knowing about her enthusiasm for castles, there was a good chance that she would find his proposal agreeable, but he hadn't been a hundred percent sure about it. Now that it had turned out how thrilled Lana was about the idea, he became unspeakably relieved, and felt at once more relaxed. With a naughty smile on his lips, he took the appropriate exit and continued their journey along the A395 to what is, according to legend, the birthplace of King Arthur: the ruins of Tintagel Castle.

An expression of enchantment spread on Lana's face as they left behind the fields, then Tintagel village, and approached the steep, rocky beach. They smiled at each other airily as the familiar salty smell of the sea filled their nostrils. Hayden stopped the car, and they both got out. She closed her eyes and leaning back her head, inhaled deeply, and for a few moments, quietly enjoyed the vibrancy of the fresh air. Hayden took her by the hand, and led her all the way to the edge of the cliff. Looking down into the dizzying depths, they caught sight of the roaring sea under their feet. Lana spread her arms, and like a little girl, spun around in ecstasy. She couldn't get enough of the breathtaking view. Her heart overflowed with gratitude for all the goodness of the things that had recently happened to her, and for the 'here and now' which seemed incredibly perfect to her. She ran to Hayden, who was studying her with his arms folded on his chest. Despite his smile, his gaze was serious and all

pervasive. Lana wrapped her arms around him, and looked into his eyes with visible adoration. She wanted to make him understand. She wanted to tell him that it was his presence that produced the perfect harmony in her soul. But, by the time she could speak, Hayden had drawn her into his arms, and eagerly taken her lips, making her silent for a while. Later, catching her breath, she whispered a Thank you into his ear with a euphoric smile, and then, as though happiness was too much for her to take, she broke herself free from him, and ran a few steps away so she could admire the view again.