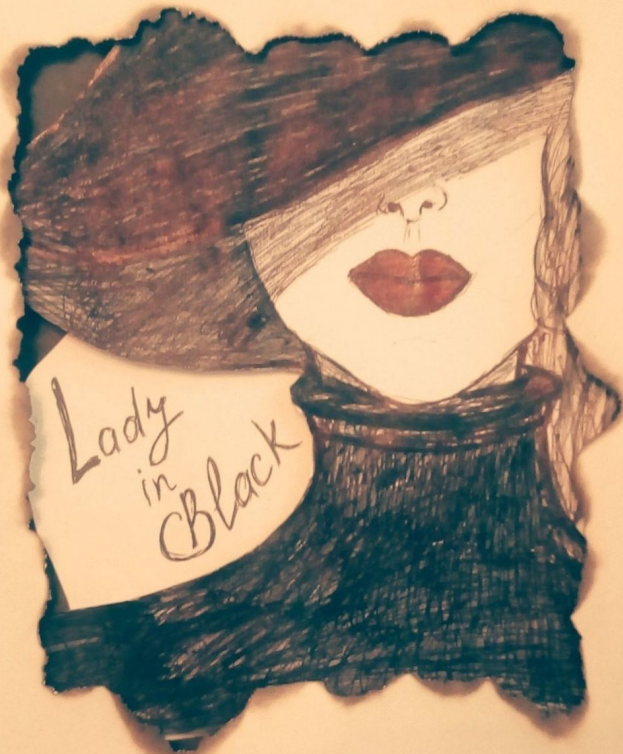


Lady in Black



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http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=42832549

ISBN 9785449698087

Аннотация

There are people we love. There are those that we thought we once loved. There are friends, enemies and just people. There are a lot of different people around us. But there are those with whom we would never want to meet. Pain and tears sometimes generate understanding, compassion, and forgiveness. And sometimes they generate hatred and evil...

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Lady in Black

Yuliya Alpagut

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ISBN 978-5-4496-9808-7

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There are things that we just remember. There are things that we do not want to forget. There are things that we cannot forget, no matter how much we want it.

There is something that we easily forgive. There is something that is hard for us to forgive, but we forgive. And there is something that we cannot forgive, no matter how much we want it.

There are people we love. There are those that we thought we once loved. There are friends, enemies and just people. There are a lot of different people around us. But there are those with whom we would never want to meet.

Pain and tears sometimes generate understanding, compassion, and forgiveness. And sometimes they generate hatred and evil...

LADY IN BLACK

1. Who are you?

Spring. Friday. Evening. Eleanor sat in an empty classroom and almost finished checking the work of her students. The phone rang. The woman took her cell phone. Diana called. Eleanor exhaled wearily and took off her big glasses. Putting them aside, she rubbed the bridge of her nose with her fingers and finally answered the call.

– Hello! Hi dear! – she said when she brought the phone to her ear.

– Hello mom! – her daughter's voice rang out, – When will you come? I thought you would come early! We agreed to go shopping with you! – the twenty-year-old girl said indignantly.

– Sorry, honey. I'm already finishing up. In ten minutes I will leave.

– Ok. I'm waiting for you. Bye.

– Bye, Diana. I will be soon, – said Eleanor and turned off the phone.

Fifteen minutes later, the woman finished her work and began to gather home. She threw a mobile phone and large nondescript glasses into her huge, worn and shapeless bag. A little tidied up on the desktop and, having thrown a bag over her shoulder, looked around at the empty classroom. Sighing wearily, she went to the door.

Eleanor was about to leave the classroom, but stopped near

a large mirror that hang there. The woman looked at her reflection.

The forty-six-year-old primary school teacher looked rather unattractive. She looked repulsive. Dyed white, dirty hair was collected in a ponytail at the back of the head. “Bags” under small, inexpressive eyes, small sharp nose, dried thin lips, pale skin. Dry hands and broken nails... The woman did not take care of herself.

Eleanor looked at herself in the mirror. An unkempt, tall, overweight woman looked at her from there. In a shapeless blouse, like a robe, dirty yellow color, in the same, shapeless as a bag, long skirt disgusting swamp color and brown worn out sandals.

Eleanor looked at herself and smiled. Despite her ridiculous and even unpleasant appearance, she liked herself. And none of her entourage never told her how disgusting she looks. Most people didn't care. And for her three children, she was just a mother. And the children look at the mother in a completely different way. They do not always notice how bad she looks or even the fact that she has already grown old.

Her husband did not love her. Just like she did not love him too. But no one ever talked about this.

The husband never told Eleanor how unattractive she looked. On the contrary, on social networks and in person meeting friends and acquaintances of their family, he sometimes talked about how beautiful she is. But it was just a lie. Only Eleanor did

not know this. The forty-eight-year-old man, Marcus Ramirez, Mexican by birth, played the role of husband and father very well. Exactly played a role. He didn't love his wife, with whom he had lived for over twenty years, nor his two daughters – 20-year-old Diana and eighteen-year-old Alice. Only the youngest son, fifteen-year-old Calib, was the only person in their family whom Marcus really seemed to love. All the others were as if only a part of some seemingly endless play called "Life".

Marcus would have divorced Eleanor long ago, but he could not. He couldn't because he was very afraid of convictions. The man was very dependent on the opinions of others about his person. Therefore, with all his might, he tried to play his husband and father roles as best he could. And he succeeded. There has never been any respect or love in this family. Only roles... Game... Game and roles...

Eleanor looked at her reflection and smiled. "What an attractive woman!" – she thought about herself and, turning off the light, left the classroom.

She closed the door and, throwing the key in her large bag, turned around to go down the corridor towards the stairs. But the woman did not even have time to take a step, as the light in the corridor suddenly went out. It was still quite bright outside, but even there, outside the windows, the light seemed to low. Eleanor was frightened, and after a moment turned white with fear. At the end of the corridor, from the doorway, that led to the stairs, suddenly poured black, thick smoke.

“Fire!” – thought a woman. But no specific smells, no shouts or voices, and indeed no sounds could be heard. It seemed that all living things around suddenly ceased to exist.

A few seconds passed and the smoke began to dissipate. There, at the end of the corridor, near the stairs, Eleanor saw the outlines of a woman. A short, slim, completely black figure, like a shadow, slowly moved toward her. Long, narrow, black, similar to the mourning, dress to the floor. Black patent leather shoes, the toes of which were visible from under the hem, when a woman was taking step by step. Black gloves on hands. On the head of a strange lady was a black hat with a wide brim. And she bent her head a little bit down, as if she was looking at her feet. Because of this, Eleanor could not see her face.

Lady in black slowly moved to Eleanor. She walked, but her steps were so light that it seemed she was just floating through the air.

Eleanor did not understand what was happening. She was scared and amazed. She, as if spellbound, looked at the black figure moving toward her.

The woman did not move and seemed to stop breathing for a while.

The lady in black “swam” to Eleanor quite close and stopped at arm’s length.

Passed about a minute. Strange woman in black was silent. Eleanor too.

– Who you are? – finally the teacher asked in a voice shaking

with fear.

The lady did not answer her. She slowly raised her head so that Eleanor could see the lower part of her face. It was the face of a young, beautiful woman. Her skin was so white that it seemed to Eleanor that it was not a face at all, but a beautiful mask. White as snow, beautiful mask with dark, almost black lips.

The teacher shuddered from what she saw and took a step back.

– Who you are? – she asked quietly again.

The lady in black smiled strangely and, taking a couple of steps forward, touched with her graceful hand in a black glove Eleanor's shoulder. Woman immediately felt a terrible cold running all over her body. So, as if in an instant she was in the freezer.

The teacher's heart almost stopped for fear. She wanted to shake the hand of a woman in black from her shoulder and run away, but could not even move. Her whole body seemed paralyzed.

– Who you are? What do you want? – Eleanor muttered, her voice shaking with fear.

– I am the pain, – quietly, barely audible said lady in black.

She no longer opened her mouth, but Eleanor heard the word “pain” many times as if the echo repeated it again and again and again and again...

An entire eternity seemed to have passed, and the woman

in black suddenly disappeared. Dissolved in the air as if she never existed. The light in the hallway lights up again.

Eleanor, recovering a little from what she had seen, quickly ran down a long corridor to the stairs and after a minute jumped out of the school building.

The street is already quite dark. The night has come. But the woman did not notice this. She quickly jumped into her car and drove toward her house.

Eleanor did not seem to see anything around. No roads, no cars, no houses...

Before her eyes was the image of a lady in black, and “goosebumps” ran down the skin. The woman now and again shook from the cold as if in the midst of a warm spring, winter had suddenly come.

2. All is well...

– Oh my god! Mama! Where have you been? I almost lost my mind! Thought something happened to you! – worried and indignant at the same time, Diana said when Eleanor entered the house.

– What? – woman said with incomprehension.

Eleanor really did not understand at all why her daughter told her what she had said. After their conversation, the woman lingered only twenty minutes.

– Mom! Where have you been so long?! – Diana asked again, – And why didn't you answer the calls?!

– What are the calls? – still not understanding what was going on, Eleanor asked.

Diana looked at her strangely.

– Mom, are you okay? – she asked.

The woman, without answering her daughter, put her hand in her large bag and, after half a minute finding her mobile phone, turned it on and looked at the screen. Two in the morning and a few dozen missed calls from children and husband.

– Oh my God... – breathed Eleanor, – What is it?.. – she muttered barely audibly and, with a detached facial expression, slowly walked into the living room.

Diana followed her.

Still looking at the screen of her mobile phone, Eleanor quietly

sank onto the sofa.

– Mom where have you been? – Diana asked again.

Eleanor looked at her daughter with some crazy eyes.

– At school, – she answered.

– In which school? – the girl was outraged, – Have you seen what time it is now?!

Eleanor looked at the clock on the phone again.

– Two in the morning, – she said softly as if she couldn't believe it.

– Oh god! Mom what's going on?! – throwing up her hands, Diana exclaimed and, sitting down next to her mother on the sofa, looked into her insane eyes.

– Nothing, – a little coming to herself, Eleanor answered her, – Everything is fine dear.

– Fine?! You should have come home a few hours ago! Where have you been? Something happened? – taking the mother by the shoulders asked her Diana.

– Nothing. Nothing happened, – Eleanor shook her head, – I just... Just met a long-time acquaintance, and we decided to sit in a cafe for a while, – she lied.

Eleanor did not want to tell her daughter about her strange vision. And not only to her. The woman decided not to tell anyone at all.

– Why didn't you warn me? I waited for you! Why didn't you answer the calls?! – standing up, Diana spoke indignantly.

– I'm sorry, my dear, I really forgot that we agreed with

you... – looking at her daughter imploringly, Eleanor said softly.

– Forgot? Ok... You forgot. But why didn't you answer the calls? We were worried about you!

– I probably did not hear, – Eleanor once again lied, – Inside the cafe was so noisy... And... I completely lost track of time...

– Ufff... – breathed Diana, – Ok... Go to sleep. It's late, – she said.

– Yes, Ok, – mother answered her.

The girl was about to go to her room, but Eleanor called her.

– Diana, – the woman called her.

– Yes mom?

– Where is everyone?

– Mom! Two in the morning! Alice and Calib have been sleeping for a long time!

– And your father?

– Father left a couple of hours ago.

– Left? – asked Eleanor, – Where?

– Yes, mom left. To work.

The woman turned on her mobile phone again and looked at the screen.

– Today is Saturday, – she said, – It's already saturday...

– Yes. You forgot? Dad said on Monday that he is working this Saturday.

– Yeah right, – breathed Eleanor.

In his youth, Marcus, Eleanor's husband, was a marine, and now, for many years, he worked at night as a security guard

in a large company in the city of “L”, that was located twenty kilometers from their small town “D”. Because of night work, Marcus only saw his family on weekends. He came home from work when no one was home. He had dinner, took a shower and went to bed. And he left home when everyone was asleep. On weekends, he didn’t often spend time with his family. Mostly only on holidays. Such as Christmas, Halloween, and other. On a typical weekend, the man tried not to be at home. He was constantly found new hobbies for himself to see his wife as rarely as possible. Gym, martial arts, Latin American dances... Or just spending time with his friends and girlfriends. If Marcus managed to persuade his son to spend time with him, the man gladly went somewhere with him. But Calib was no longer a little boy. And he preferred to spend time with friends than with his father.

– Mom, is everything okay with you? – Diana asked again.

– Yes, everything is fine, dear. Forgive me. We agreed with you, and I...

– All right, mom. Do not worry. The main thing is that you’re okay. Go to bed. Too late. Tomorrow we will talk.

– Ok, – the woman agreed, – Good night, – she told her daughter who was already standing in the doorway.

– Good night mom, – Diana said and went to her room.

Eleanor was left alone in the living room. She turned her vision over and over again. The woman could not understand how could a few hours fall out of her life. She tried to remember what she

did after she left the classroom. But nothing besides that strange and frightening vision, a lady in a long black dress and black hat, did not occur to her. Completely exhausted, Eleanor lay down on the sofa in the living room, right in the clothes she wore and, having closed her eyes, fell asleep.

3. Just a dream?

Saturday was like it wasn't at all. Marcus came home in the afternoon. He took a shower and went to bed. The man slept until the evening.

Diana was walking with her friends. Alice was visiting her friends. Calib read some book in his room. Everything was as usual.

And only Eleanor could not find a place for herself. "Who is she? What was that?" Thought the woman. She asked herself dozens of questions, but she could not find an answer even to one of them. Although sometimes it seemed to her, she had once seen the face of this lady in black. But Eleanor could not remember where and when. "Who is she? Why come? What did she want? Ghost? Spirit?.. Or am I just crazy?.."

In the evening, the whole family gathered in the backyard. Marcus cooked a barbecue and after dinner everyone went to their usual places.

Sunday. Morning. The Ramirez family was going to church. They were all Baptists. And, as an exemplary family, every Sunday they all went to their Baptist church in the city "D" together. Although none of them wanted it. But these were also their roles, which they all had to play.

This morning everything was as usual.

When the sermons and chants were over, they all left the church and headed for the car. Everyone wanted to get home quickly to go about their business.

Marcus took the wheel. Diana, Alice and Calib – in the back seat. Everyone waited only for Eleanor. But she, standing right by the car door, just froze and looked away into the distance.

There, across the street, Eleanor saw a lady in black. A completely black figure with a white as snow face stood motionless and seemed to be looking straight at her.

“Pain... Pain...” – was heard in the head of a woman. Eleanor closed her eyes for a moment, and when she opened them – the vision disappeared.

The woman quickly got into the car.

– Everything is good? – asked Marcus.

– Yes, – she answered uncertainly.

This Sunday was the same for everyone as always. For everyone, but not for Eleanor.

The children went about their business. They met with friends, walked and had fun. Marcus played some kind of game in his mobile phone. Only there he felt like a real man. No one in this game knew who he was, what he looked like, his age and status... Absolutely nothing. There, Marcus was like a different person. Everyone thought he was a famous actor or some other popular

person. And the man liked it. He tried to make people think that he was a “star”. Marcus wanted respect and recognition. He dreamed about it. He needed that. Maybe because he didn’t get it from his wife, or maybe because he was just sick. As the disease affects the cells of the body, the lie struck his soul. And it gave rise to all the big lies.

Marcus felt like a man, a hero and a commander in his game. And, satisfying his spiritual needs for respect and love, there he was even a little happy.

Eleanor sat in a chair on the veranda in the backyard and, watching her two cats and a dog, thought of the lady in black.

After this strange vision in school, Eleonora tried not to linger at work anymore and leave with all the other teachers. If the woman did not have time to do something, now she took the work at home.

So two weeks passed and everything seemed to be normal. Eleanor even began to forget about her vision. And now what happened seemed to her just some strange, terrible dream. “Maybe it was a dream?” – she thought.

Ultimately, the woman came to the conclusion that it really was just a bad dream. She apparently fell asleep at work and black smoke, and the lady in a black dress she just dreamed. And the fact that she saw this strange woman there, not far from the church, was simply the fruit of her frightened imagination.

4. Candle

Saturday. Around midnight. Diana was going to a disco with her friends. Alice chatted with friends on social networks. Calib was watching TV. Marcus played his game in the phone. Eleanor lay in one of the rooms on the couch. Wearing her big glasses, she read a book under the dim lighting of a floor lamp.

Suddenly the woman felt a strange cold. As if someone ran icy fingers over her face. She abruptly sat on the couch. The book fell out of her hands and fell on the floor.

Eleanor looked at where this “someone” was supposed to be. But nobody except her was here.

The woman looked at the small room several times as if she was looking for someone or something. She gazed into every shadow, but found nothing unusual.

“It’s late... I’m just tired...” – glancing at the clock on one of the shelves of the bookcase, she thought.

– I’m going to bed, – Eleanor said out loud.

Taking a deep breath, she wanted to pick up a book from the floor, when suddenly there was a deaf bang and the light in the room went out, plunging the woman into total darkness. Eleanor screamed and jumped on the couch in surprise and fright. She began to look around, but nothing was visible. Absolutely nothing. It was so dark around that the woman did not even see her own hands. The dim light of the street lamp, which

was supposed to penetrate into the room from a non-curtained window, also went out. It seemed that their whole small town “D” was plunged into darkness or she just blinded in an instant.

– Marcus! – Eleanor suddenly screamed, – Marcus!

After a moment, the door to the room opened abruptly. The woman jumped to her feet and looked in the doorway. There, in the dark, high above the floor, something shone. Eleanor staggered with surprise, surprise and fear, and held her breath.

– Nora? Are you here? – Marcus’s voice rang out.

– Damn, – finally breathed a woman, – You scared me!

– It was you scared me! – said the man and came closer.

He shone a flashlight on his mobile phone in her face. The woman automatically struck his arm, drawing the light aside.

– You screamed so much, I already thought that someone was killing you here! – he said.

– I was just scared, – confessed woman.

– It seems all over the city turned off the electricity, – paying no attention to his wife’s frightened expression, Marcus said.

– Where are the children? – after a brief pause, Eleanor suddenly asked.

– In their rooms, – her husband answered her, – Disco for Diana, apparently, is canceled...

– Yeah, – gasped woman.

– Are you going to sleep? – Marcus asked.

– A little bit later, – Eleanor answered him, – I will sit here for a bit. I need to think.

– About what?

– No matter. Shine on me, I'll get the candles, – asked the woman and went to the closet.

Marcus followed her.

Eleanor took out a few candles and a lighter from the box. She placed them in the candlesticks and set them on fire.

– Ok, you can go, – looking at her husband she said.

– Thank you for allowing, – he said dismissively.

– You are welcome, – she answered quietly.

– I will sit a little on the veranda. I'll breathe the fresh air, – Marcus told her and leaving the room he slammed the door behind him.

– Sometimes you annoy me so much... – quietly, barely audible, said Eleanor when the door closed behind her husband.

The woman tiredly plopped down on the couch and wanted to pick up a book from the floor, which she dropped before the lights went out, but it was not on the floor. Eleanor looked around the room for her book.

– I do not remember that I lifted you, – she said out loud like a book could hear her.

Suddenly something splashed next to her on the couch. Eleanor shuddered, turned and looked beside her. There, on the couch, next to her, lay her book.

The woman stood abruptly. She looked at the most ordinary book as if it was not a book at all, but something terrible. She could not remember that she was picking up a book from the

floor. Yes, and this slap... Like someone just dropped a book on the couch next to her...

Eleanor suddenly felt cold again. It smelled like winter around. Woman scared even more. She wrapped her arms around herself and wanted to turn in the direction of the door to leave the room, but something seemed to stop her. She looked at the book again, and to her surprise and horror the book opened itself. The words on the pages began to fade until there was only one word "YOU". Then the pages of the book turned over and all the words on them, too, seemed to evaporate. All but one: "SOON." The book turned over the pages again and it all happened again. On the pages there is only one word: "DIE".

Eleanor in horror rushed to the door. But how much she pulled the handle, the door did not open. Door did not even shudder from the blows when the woman began to beat it with her fists. It seemed that it was not at all a thin wooden door, but a blank stone wall.

"Help me!" – Eleanor wanted to shout out, but before she could open her mouth, in the room, somewhere behind her, a resounding, unnatural, chilling soul, feminine laughter rang out.

Eleanor swung around and looked where the sound came from. There, not far from her, there was a lady in black.

About a minute passed before the strange woman, in a long black dress and hat, stopped laughing. Wiping tears with her fingers under her eyes, spilled out of laughter, the lady in black looked up and stared with her black, like the night, eyes, at

Eleanor.

– You are so funny, – she said softly and smiled.

– How... How did you get here? – with a voice shaking with fear, asked Eleanor.

– How? Simply. Entered the door, – grinning, the lady in black answered her.

– But the door was closed...

– So what? Do you think this can stop me? – the lady smiled again.

– Who are you? What do you need from me? – a little emboldened and taking a step forward, Eleanor asked loudly.

– Ooo! – lady in black said, – What? Not afraid of me anymore?

– What do you want? Kill me? – even more loudly asked Eleanor.

– Kill? Oh no my dear... It was just a joke... Or maybe... – the lady in black was silent and somehow strangely grinned.

– Who are you? – once again asked Eleanor, – Ghost? Spirit? Demon?

– No, no and NO, – the lady in black answered her, – Although the word “Demon” would probably suit me...

– Who are you?

– I already told you who I am. I am a pain. I am Suffering. I'm what your miserable, worthless, vile family spawned, – the lady in black this time rudely and evil answered her.

Then she slowly took from the bookshelf a frame with a photo

and gently ran her finger over each one who was captured in the picture, quietly pronouncing their names.

– Eleanor... Diana... Alice... Calib... Marcus...

A deathly silence reigned in the room for a minute. The lady in black looked at the picture, and Eleanor looked at her. It seemed to the woman that tears flowed down the cheeks of a strange, frightening, uninvited guest.

– Marcus... – the lady in black once again said Eleanor's husband name and looked at this, as she thought, wretched woman who stood just a few steps away from her.

The lady in black looked at the mistress of the house with such hatred and pain in her eyes that Eleanor even caught her breath from horror.

– What do you want? – squeaked Eleanor.

– I want... I want to never exist. You or Marcus... Can any of you go back in time and fix something that shouldn't have happened? – viciously cried out the lady in black and threw a frame with a photo directly into Eleanor.

The woman managed to bounce to the side and the frame hitting the door and broke with a terrible noise.

– Can you go back to the past? – already quietly, calmly, and even imploringly, said the lady in black.

– Not, – Eleanor shook her head quietly.

– Then you have to pay for everything!

– For what? I did not do anything wrong!

– That's what you think! You all think so! If you didn't steal,

you didn't kill... Does this mean you have done nothing wrong?! Not! This is not true! And... You know me! You know me! You knew everything! You knew everything, and did not even try to fix something...

– I do not understand what you're saying!

– You just do not want to understand anything! But, if you did not kill anyone, it does not mean that you didn't do anything wrong! You... If you at least asked me for forgiveness... But you will not do this!

– I do not know who are you! Why should I ask for forgiveness?!

– You know everything, – grinned lady in black, – You know everything... But, if like that... Welcome to Hell! I will kill you all one by one...

– Get out of my house! – Eleanor suddenly screamed and grabbed a figurine from the nightstand, rushed at the lady in black, but swept through her, as if the uninvited guest was just a vision.

– Fool, – grinned lady in black, – You can't do anything to me! But I... I can do a lot... But... I have an offer for you...

– Damn... What are you?! – quietly whispered to death scared and at the same time furious Eleanor.

– I am your worst nightmare! And... You are not listening to me! – the lady in black said loudly and in an instant she was next to Eleanor.

The terrible guest grabbed the woman with her icy hand by the

wrist of the hand in which she held the statuette, and squeezed it so tightly that the pain pierced the woman's entire body and she opened her fist and dropped her "weapon".

– You do not need it, – quietly, looking straight into Eleanor's eyes, said the lady in black.

Then she grabbed the woman by the throat. Eleanor was much taller than her and twice as large, but the lady in black easily lifted the large woman slightly above the floor.

Eleanor just managed to cling with both hands to the hand of the lady in black, as she threw her on the couch like a light rag doll.

The woman grabbed her throat with both hands and trying to catch her breath, she did not look away from the terrible guest.

– What do you want? – caught her breath again asked Eleanor.

– Maybe kill you... – the lady in black answered her calmly.

– It is not true, – Eleanor retorted quietly, – If you wanted to kill me, you would have done it already. What do you need from me?

– It's strange that you still think that this is just a dream, and I am a figment of your imagination... – not paying attention to the question of Eleanor, said the lady in black.

Then she slowly walked to the door and slowly picked up a photograph of the Ramirez family from the floor.

– You are all so vile, – quietly said the lady in black and went to the coffee table, which stood in the corner of the room and carefully sat on it.

On the table in the candlestick burned a candle. Near there were some papers. These were some documents. The lady in black took something out of the pile and threw it away, away from the table.

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