



The Bonds

NOVEL BY AGNIESZKA GAJDA



978-83-961438-0-8

This book is a work of fiction. Names, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the written permission of the publisher.



The Bonds

NOVEL BY AGNIESZKA GAJDA



scene one

You are standing in the field. It is almost dark around you. You cannot tell whether those little light rays mean sunrise or sunset. Really, you do not even care. The grass beneath your feet is short. If you are barefoot, you can feel a kind of unpleasant stinging made from sharp grass's edges, dry because of lacking enough sun and water. Look around. Please, be quiet. He can hear you, if you move too loudly. Listen. No, he would not tell you anything. Truly, he cannot even feel your presence right now. His only feelings are grief, sorrow, and a deep darkness of despair. Why? Stay silent presently, please. I am going to tell you. Pay attention.

It may take a while, but you have enough time, am I right? You may take a seat, as when you watch a show. Nevertheless, it will not be a pleasant spectacle, not at all. And remember about those sharp edges of the grass, like I have warned you before. So better stand. Soon, I will show you other places as well. We are going to have quite a beautiful journey together.

That man is Michael, Michael Spencer. Today is the eleventh of October, nineteen oh three. We are in England. Have you ever been there? Maybe yes, or maybe not. But I am sure that you have never been here over a hundred years ago. I suppose, however, that you know something. From books, or movies perhaps. There is plenty of it today. And now, here is only another story, nonetheless I must assure you that that particular story is true. Someday in the past, all of it had happened once. *Oh!* But it was so many, many years ago. You might close your eyes now and try to imagine, or keep them wide open - be watching and listening.

You still see him. He is probably in his late thirties, or maybe even early forties. He wears linen, long pants, a long-sleeved shirt with tiny buttons, the whole beige with thin, vertical stripes, also beige - but in another shade of that colour. On the shirt you see a woven gilen, its colour is light brown, or maybe even darker beige. Exactly the same tone as his pants. The whole creates some kind of a suit, I suppose - a very popular uniform back then, indeed.

There are also dark brown, leather shoes on his feet. If you look closer, you may see two golden cuff links on his cuffs and a thin, golden ring on his ring finger too. It has been two years now, and he has not taken it off yet, not even once. Also these cufflinks, he wears them every single day since it happened. M - it is written on the right. Michael. S - on the left one. Sarah. She was only twenty two on that fatal day. Poor wee thing. But everyone knows about Sarah. It was one of those tragic, miserable deaths. Well, accidents happen everyday.

Maybe not? If you will be patient enough, I am going to tell you before long. Now, however, you have to think that it was only one more bad accident, nothing more and nothing less. Anyway, like I have said, Sarah's thing knows everyone around. In fact, it was a popular headline in many local newspapers during some months, possibly even half of a year. There is nothing to be surprised of - people love rumours, they love chatting about everything: especially if it is connected with someone wealthy and popular, like Mistress Sarah's kindred.

Above all, Michael and Sarah had their intimate tiny secret, and they could not, and they also did not want to tell anybody about it. It probably had to be a surprise, a happy news for both their families. Partially it is maybe good that only Michael knows now. Because, even bigger rumours, they would finally kill him, I am sure of it. The thing is that there was a baby. *Their* baby, four-month old, inside Sarah. Nobody found out about that child yet. And no one would ever know. However Michael; he went insane. He is not the same person after those deaths.

I am going to show you, but later. Anyway, there was a funeral too, two months after - when Sarah's body had been found at last, under a stack of half-burned wood, sand, and different pieces of stones. That debris was a wrench of the Bingham's hunting house, but unused for quite a long time then. It was the old, local hunter who had found her body. Actually it was his dog, which at first detected a source of that imaginable stench. It started barking so loud that its owner could not hunt, of course. Soon, after not more than half of a mile from the old hunter's cottage (he was living alone with his dog, on the edge of the Bingham's property), the animal had started running very fast, and then also its owner - he started running as well.

Obviously, he could not lose his dog, because it was a great hunting dog, who had been helping him many times during their common expeditions. Thus they had been both running through the woods, and then the dog ran into a field, suddenly stopped, and started barking again. People say that when the old hunter had seen that debris, he had just reminded himself about that hunting house's history. It is where Mr Robert French (God rest his soul), one of the former landlords, used to live during a hunting season. Nevertheless, it is only an insignificant hearsay. Mr French had died long ago, even before the old hunter moved here. In fact, they had never met each other. Mr Robert French had died before Michael was born.

And another rumour is that Mrs Spencer - Sarah I mean (before she had married Michael, Miss Bingham), she loved that small house and used to stay in there. She drew, and sewed, and read inside, actually since she was a little girl. After the wedding, people say, it was her only refuge, her safe piece of the world, by contrast to the tremendous manor three miles off.

Let's go back to the old hunter. He had seen a lot during his entire life, thus when he saw the debris that day, he at once realised what must have happened there. It was a scorching summer then indeed, it was hot, all the grasses were begging for even one drop of water. Under such circumstances, a fire is not anything odd. And at that moment, the old hunter would walk away, and maybe say a word to Mr Spencer about a necessity to clean up there, and remove the debris. He turned back, next he started walking in the direction of his house.

Immediately, he noticed. *Where is my dog?* He turned back again, where his dog was still sitting, and still gawking at the debris. Suddenly the animal stood up, and started barking yet again, even louder. *Come here!* Screamed the old hunter, but it did not work. He reached to his belt, where he had a rope. He wanted to tie his disobedient dog. He took a few steps ahead, and it is when he finally saw. Now, you are also there. Right in that field, seeing either the old hunter, his dog, or those ugly remnants of the cottage. Come closer, do not be afraid.

Oh yes! It is exactly the same field, you have already been here, at the beginning of that tale. But Michael is gone now. It has been only his mind, only his memory, what I showed you. Now, however, you can see all of it very clearly, the stack of half-burned wood, stones, and sand. There is a piece of white lace, and something similar to a hem of a dress as well. And there is also a body. *Her body*, perhaps. In fact, it has been two months since she has gone. The hunter is coming closer, so you do the same. Truly, it is your time. You will see her now. The hunter grips one bigger stone, lifts it up (he is a strong man indeed), and throws it away.

Although he is physically strong, maybe, mentally that hunter is just a child, nothing more. Are you resistant to the sight of a dead, half-burned body? Even if you wanted, you would not recognise the corpse of a beautiful lady, she has been someday before. During the ball night, two months ago. *What happened?* You may ask. At the ball night she danced with one rich Lord, and next with Michael, and soon with another, even richer Lord. Now ... Now she is here, it must be Sarah. You shudder. Also the old hunter made himself aware. But he was frightened so deeply that he started running back to his home, after he threw the stone away. And his dog, it felt his owner's fear, so it started running with him, not wanting to stay behind.

Well, there are only you two right now. You and Sarah. She is twenty two, such a pretty girl. *Oh!* Sadly, not pretty anymore. You can see, there is the same thin golden ring on her ring finger. Do you remember that ring? Yes, It is exactly the same Michael had. He constantly wears that ornament, you will meet him soon. *What happened to Sarah?* You think, and ask. Thus I am going to answer, if you please. During the ball night, not long after midnight, Sarah somehow found herself in that tiny hunting house. *What was she doing?* You may also ask. *Shouldn't she be tired after dancing almost all night long?* Maybe yes, maybe she was that far tired that her subconscious ordered her to hide there, inside her only refuge in this world?

And consequently, I presume, it might be only a matter of minutes or hours, when the climax of that tragedy took its place. *But what was first?* A fire? Or perhaps the house just collapsed due to its old age, and then the fire from the wee fireplace started spreading, whereas Sarah was sleeping. Probably she had not even noticed, when everything around started burning?

I hope that she did not suffer a lot. However, we shall be honest, being burned is not rather the most pleasant form of a death. *But ...* You state. *What if Sarah had already been dead, when the house began to burn?* Maybe she has not seen any fire at all? Good point. After all, I expected that you would notice it too. Today I cannot tell you more, unfortunately. Soon there would be another part of our story, and then you would get a clearer view of the whole.

You are in England, the 19th and 20th centuries. You witness a murder, you would witness. But first of all you should know who, and why had to kill an innocent person: a young woman with a child. When every suspicion is incriminating her husband, a former soldier, he becomes fated to go through his own ordeal. However, in the end, is he truly guilty?

