

Tajemnica Zaklętego Serca

Characters: Lena Kowalska, Marcin Nowak, Zofia Malinowska, Adam Brzeziński

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Chapter 1

I step out of the rain-soaked tram onto the slick pavement of Kraków's old town, the downpour finally easing into a misty drizzle that clings to my coat. My shoes squelch as I cross the street toward the familiar café on Grodzka, drawn by the faint glow of its windows despite the late hour. A sudden gust carries the scent of wet stone and roasting chestnuts, stirring memories I thought I'd buried. I push open the heavy wooden door, the bell above it jingling softly, and scan the half-empty room until my gaze lands on Lena standing by the counter. She turns at the sound, her eyes widening in recognition, and I feel my pulse quicken with that old, unwelcome mix of anger and pull. "Lena," I say quietly, my voice steadier than I feel, as I approach and stop just short of arm's reach. The warmth inside contrasts sharply with the chill still seeping from my damp sleeves. She sets down her untouched coffee, her fingers trembling slightly. "What the hell are you doing here, Adam?"

Her question lands like a slap, but before I can form a reply the café door creaks again and Marcin's familiar voice cuts through the tension behind me. I turn my head just enough to see him approach with that calculated calm he's always worn like armor, his hand settling on Lena's shoulder in a gesture that feels pointed. My stomach tightens at the sight, old betrayals flaring hot under my skin while rain drips from my cuffs onto the floorboards. Then Zofia emerges from the shadowed hallway, her eyes glistening as she positions herself beside Lena like a shield, her quiet warning hanging in the warm air between us. The three of them arrayed against me in this small space suddenly makes the walls feel closer, the scent of coffee turning bitter on my tongue. I draw a slow breath, forcing my shoulders to relax even as my mind races through every rehearsed excuse I prepared on the train. "I came because some things can't stay buried anymore," I say evenly, meeting each of their gazes in turn without flinching. The words taste like ash, yet they're the only truth I have left tonight. My fingers curl around the edge of a nearby chair as I wait for whatever comes next.

My fingers curl around the edge of a nearby chair as I wait for whatever comes next. Lena's sharp words slice through the humid air and I feel the old scar on my left knuckle throb in time with my heartbeat.

I release the chair and straighten my shoulders, the damp fabric of my coat pulling tight across my back while Marcin's cold smile sends a fresh wave of resentment through my chest.

Zofia's trembling voice reaches me next and something inside twists at the fear I hear beneath it, reminding me exactly why I boarded that delayed train.

The bell above the door jingles once more as a lone customer slips out into the night, leaving us four in a silence thick enough to taste.

"I didn't come to dig up graves or play games," I say, my tone low but firm as I meet Lena's furious gaze without blinking.

Rainwater still trickles from my sleeve onto the tiled floor, forming a small dark pool that reflects

the overhead lights like scattered coins.

Marcin shifts his weight and I notice the way his hand remains protectively near Lena, a detail that stings more than I expected after all this time.

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Lena's voice cracks on the demand and my hand moves of its own accord, drawing the creased print free so the image of the four of us laughing on that old bridge faces them all. Marcin's fist tightens visibly at his side while Zofia wipes another tear, her quiet plea still echoing in my ears. I feel the damp wool of my coat clinging heavier now, the café's warmth doing nothing to thaw the knot in my gut. The photograph trembles slightly between my fingers as I hold it out, its edges worn from years in my wallet. "It's the only proof left that we were ever whole," I say, the words scraping out lower than intended. Rain patters harder against the windowpane behind me, syncing with the rapid pulse in my temples. Lena's eyes lock on the picture and I see the exact moment recognition hits her like a physical blow. Her fingers brush mine as she reaches to take it, the contact sending an unexpected jolt up my arm.

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Marcin's hand shoots forward and snatches the photo from between us with a sharp tug that makes the paper crease instantly.

I watch the pieces flutter down after he tears them in three decisive rips, the ink bleeding into the puddle at our feet.

Zofia steps half in front of Lena, her voice breaking on a plea that hits me square in the chest while her fingers twist the hem of her sweater.

The café lights suddenly feel too bright against the storm outside, casting long shadows that stretch across the wet floor like accusing fingers.

My throat tightens as I meet Marcin's cold stare and hear his low threat about touching her again, the words landing heavier than the rain still dripping from my collar.

Lena's sharp retort cuts through next, her sarcasm wrapping around the demand for my real reason and I feel that old familiar pull mixed with fresh regret.

I shift my weight, one hand rising instinctively toward the inner pocket where the second envelope waits, its seal still unbroken.

The envelope's corner presses against my ribs as I draw it out halfway and Lena's eyes follow the motion with unmistakable dread.