



FIVE EVENINGS

S. RANNIKOV
Dark Desires Book 5

18+

Stepan Rannikov

Five evenings

«АВТОР»

2026

Rannikov S.

Five evenings / S. Rannikov — «АВТОР», 2026

In the shadows of a Soviet sanatorium, where whispers carry farther than the rustle of autumn leaves, one woman's forbidden past is about to be laid bare. "In the shadows of memory, secrets unravel. Five evenings to confess, surrender, and be reborn." Oksana arrives at the elite writers retreat carrying a quarter-century of shame, desire, and silence. At forty, she is the respectable wife of a prominent scientist—yet one chance meeting with the enigmatic writer Arseny awakens something dangerously alive inside her. What begins as a simple invitation to tell her story becomes an intoxicating ritual of confession and command. Each evening, in the intimate glow of a green-shaded lamp, Oksana steps deeper into her own history. Before the spinning reels of a tape recorder, she relives the days. Night after night, the boundaries dissolve. It is a slow, masterful seduction where past trauma and present lust entwine so tightly that both Oksana and the reader lose themselves.

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PROLOGUE

"Very curious. This is the first time I've met a living writer."

Oksana walked thoughtfully along a shady path among tall, old trees, her steps slow beside the man at her side. The air in Istra was thick with the warmth of Indian summer—perfect for a relaxing holiday at the sanatorium for creative workers. Her husband had gone to great lengths to secure her a spot in this elite retreat, even though he was already a renowned scientist. In the 1980s, many things in the USSR still hinged on connections.

At forty, Oksana felt the weight of envious, obsequious glances from the staff. They'd never seen her here before, unlike the regulars—writers, actors, artists. Who was she? Oksana Ignatyevna? How had she managed to get in?

"I'm not writing anything right now," the man said, his pace unhurried beside her.

"Creative block?"

"You see, Oksana, a book needs a story. A concept. It has to interest the reader. Playing with it later isn't difficult at all."

"And where does one find such a story? Wait for the muse to strike?" She plucked a maple leaf, its edges just beginning to yellow, from a low-hanging branch.

"Everyone has stories. You just have to make them want to tell them. Everyone wants to share something. But something always holds them back—shame, fear, guilt, the fear of judgment. What's *your* story, Oksana? Tell me." His voice was light, almost casual. "After all, you're leaving in five days. We'll never see each other again."

CHAPTER 1

First Evening

Dusk had settled outside. Oksana sat in Arseny's room, her nerves frayed.

First, because any woman feels a certain tension when alone with a man. Even if he has no intentions, her mind races with possibilities.

"What if something happens? How would I react? How would I feel?"

Second, the room itself encouraged intimacy. The double suite in the writers' quarters was cozy, almost too intimate. The furniture was beautiful—not the mass-produced Hungarian modernism of the early '70s, but something befitting the guest's status: well-made, expensive, designed for comfort and creation. Chairs upholstered in embossed silk with sturdy armrests. A soft, thick carpet underfoot. Heavy curtains draped over the bay windows. A coffee table with a polished wooden top. A lamp with a green shade. And, most intriguingly, a compact, imported double-reel tape recorder with a microphone on a stand.

Arseny had positioned Oksana so the dim light from the table lamp illuminated her face. He sat in a chair with his back to the window, his body swallowed by shadow.

Now, she was about to tell him her story. And that was the third—and most unsettling—reason for her anxiety.

"Oksana, you'll tell me everything into the microphone. You don't need to lean in—it's quite sensitive," Arseny said, his voice calm, almost soothing.

He explained things simply, lulling her into a false sense of ease. For this, she was grateful. The decision hadn't been easy. Confessing a secret she'd carried for a quarter of a century to a stranger? Not a simple task.

But then, one day, she'd overheard a conversation between two women in a Moscow café. She hadn't caught the full context, but one line had stuck with her, gnawing at her thoughts ever since:

"Tell it all to someone, my dear. Just someone you don't know. Get it all out. Tell it to someone you're seeing for the first time and will never see again. And they'll let you go."

And then, an opportunity presented itself. Arseny hadn't coaxed or insisted. He'd simply suggested she tell him—and then seemed to forget about it entirely. The thought had festered in her mind until, the next day, during their usual post-dinner stroll along the alley, she'd blurted out:

"I want to tell you my story."

Now, here she was. In his room. He'd set the condition himself: she would come to him for five evenings before her departure and tell him everything. He would only ask questions when necessary.

As a writer, her emotions were paramount to him. Emotions, and complete frankness. The kind of raw, unfiltered truth that could one day become a full-length book.

"How did he examine you?"

The question cut through her like a blade. Arseny's first interruption since she'd begun her story. The abruptness, the nature of the question—it threw her.

"What?" she stammered.

He repeated it, his voice deliberate, unyielding:

"He examined you. Where did he look? How did he tell you to stand? To bend over? To spread your legs?"

Heat flooded her neck, her face. From the very start of her confession, Oksana's cheeks had burned, her legs pressed tightly together, as if bracing against the memories...

"The war didn't touch us. I don't remember it. Maybe because I was a child. Or maybe it was impossible to tell peacetime from wartime where we lived."

Her voice was steady, but her fingers twisted in her lap.

"Our farmstead was high in the mountains of Southern Bukovina. Just five huts. Neither Romanians, nor Germans, nor our own soldiers ever set foot there. We lived in poverty. My father worked as a farmhand for Mr. Volodarsky. We barely saw him—early spring to late fall, he was gone."

She could still hear her mother's voice, sharp and pragmatic: *"Oksanochka, you have one treasure. Your beauty. When you turn fourteen, we'll send you to the master's service. You won't get far on your own. And your beauty? That's your greatest asset."*

The tape recorder's reels spun slowly, almost silently. Oksana stared at them, avoiding Arseny's shadowed figure in the chair. Because no matter how she framed it, this story had a destination. And both she and Arseny knew where it led.

"My father took me to the master when I turned fourteen. It was the first time I'd ever seen a real estate—a large stone house with a sturdy roof, outbuildings, servants bustling in and out, livestock, even two American trucks."

She was losing herself in the past now, the room around her fading. The man sitting across from her might as well have been a stranger.

"Mr. Volodarsky—Sir Vlad, as the servants called him behind his back—looked like a huge, bearded peasant. Simple shirt, leather belt, fine boots, a Tyrolean hat. He barked orders at everyone, meddled in everything. He radiated strength. Authority. My father bowed, murmured something to him. Then a stout woman—Konstanza—approached me, took my hand, and said, *'Let's go.'*

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