
Darja Suri
While I was gone

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«Автор»
2026

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While I was gone / D. Suri — «Автор», 2026

She started losing time as a teenager. First minutes, then hours. People would tell her about conversations and actions she had no memory of. Gradually, she stopped fighting it. Those close to her notice the changes and say she is finally getting better."While I Was Gone" is a psychological story about memory lapses, suppressed emotions, and what happens when disappearing stops being frightening.

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Prologue

It started in adolescence.

At first — blackouts lasting a few minutes. Then longer. People would tell me about things that had happened, things I had no memory of.

And then it appeared.

At first — a faint dark glow around me, like something out of those esoteric teachings about auras. No one noticed it but me. When I tried to explain it to my parents, they laughed and praised me for my vivid imagination.

Something inside me would tighten and go cold whenever I looked at myself in the mirror, in photos, in videos — and saw the darkness, growing, devouring me more hungrily each time.

Twelve Days Ago

The hot water burns. The skin on my fingers has already gone red, but I keep holding my hands under the stream. I lather them again. Carefully — it's important not to miss a single spot. Under the nails. Between the fingers. The wrists. I rinse my face. Then with soap. I watch the foam swirl down the drain and wait for the moment when I'll be able to stop. But the moment doesn't come.

I blacked out again. I don't remember the conversation with the relatives — not the question, not my answer. I came back when thirty-four minutes had passed. Two more than yesterday. And in the reflection — the darkness again.

I turn and drape a small towel over the mirror. I don't want to look at it anymore. That isn't me. I just need to calm down and rejoin everyone.

I grip the edge of the sink until my knuckles go white. Breathe in. Breathe out. I need to find some hand cream, or the skin will start to crack.

Today is my uncle's birthday — my father's brother. He's forty-seven. He threw a grand party at his brand-new house, bought recently with the profits from yet another contract. I know how badly it stings my father's pride, but he plays the good guy, the proud brother.

My father wants to live his brother's life, though he'd never say so. He doesn't want a mortgage, a wife, children — those are things that have him. What he wants is to earn real money and meet a young woman every week.

It hangs in our house like stale, heavy air. My parents never argue. They pretend nothing is happening. And if nothing is happening — there's nothing to fix. There is no problem.

Eleven Days Ago

I called my cousin and asked her to walk me through what happened yesterday. And she told me.

Apparently the conversation had turned to university. After I'd shared my anxieties about enrollment and dormitory life, one of the aunts said: *"There you go again, working yourself up. Sweetheart, you're just so sensitive."* A few relatives laughed; someone patted me on the back. My cousin said my reaction had unsettled her — I'd mumbled something incoherent under my breath, smiled in a way that didn't look right, and then spent a long time drifting around the room as if I was avoiding everyone.

I thanked her briefly and said goodbye — told her I was just tired, hadn't been sleeping well.

My phone screen lights up and I see a new message: *"Can we talk?"*

My stomach instantly fills with butterflies, a tremor moves through my body, and somewhere underneath it all I feel the premonition of a storm — but I reply anyway. Almost immediately. A few seconds later he calls.

— How are you? — he asks, a little stiffly.

— Fine. You? — I keep my voice as easy as I can.

— Could be better… — he pauses. — Listen, I know the timing isn't great, but I'd like to talk about our future. If that's okay with you.

— Um… you're right, the timing isn't great. Maybe we could—

No.

No, no, no.

Again.

I find myself in the living room. On the sofa. *The Shining* is playing on TV. I look around: I'm wrapped in a blanket, holding a tub of ice cream and a spoon.

I grab my phone.

What the— An hour and a half.

An hour and a half.

I open the camera and look at myself: my face is tear-streaked. I check the call log — I was on the phone with him for twenty-three minutes. The rest of the time he'd been texting me. The last message:

"After everything I've done for you… Please, let's talk again. This time — without the emotions."

I toss the phone somewhere and burrow into the blanket. I don't want to reply. I don't want to go to the bathroom and wash my face. Because in there I'll see it again…

I'm not ready.

Not now.

Ten Days Ago

My cousin called on her own. It was unexpected — we'd only spoken yesterday. I stared at the screen for a few seconds, turning over every possible reason she might be calling, and picked up without finding a single one.

— Hey, — she said. — Do you have a minute?

Her voice was careful — the way people speak when they're afraid of startling something. I said I did.

She was quiet for a moment, then added:

— I just wanted to say… you can trust me. If something's going on — you can tell me. I'm here for you, whatever it is. I won't say a word to anyone if you don't want me to. Just know you're not alone.

Something shifted inside me at those words. As if I'd been holding something heavy for too long, and someone had finally offered to take it from me, even just for a minute.

I told her. Not everything, not all at once, but enough. About the blackouts. About the time. About how sometimes I'd come back and have no idea what I'd been doing or who I'd been during those hours. I spoke calmly, almost detachedly, as if I were recounting someone else's experience.

She didn't interrupt.

— That genuinely sounds terrifying, — she said at last. — And I believe you.

I tightened my grip on the phone.

— It's just… — she hesitated. — I'm worried. Blackouts like that can have different causes. Sometimes neurological. Sometimes it's memory. Maybe you hit your head and don't remember? Or… — she added quickly: — I'm not trying to scare you. I just think it might be worth seeing a doctor. Just to rule things out. To make sure it's nothing serious.

She listed things carefully, without pressure. Dementia. Alzheimer's. Neurology. All of it sounded reasonable. I understood that she was saying it out of care. That it was probably the most logical advice I could have heard.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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