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**Live on, my Dream!**

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## Chapter I. El.

*The Lord loves the Donbas infantry.*

*He blesses us with summer rain in the heat, strokes our heads as we ride to storm in the pickup truck bed, which volunteers arranged for us. The happiest rascals in the world.*

*If He were to ask me: who do you want to be? I would answer without hesitation:*

*— I want to be happy, Lord. This cup, with its bitterness and unbearable pain, is for me. Let me, God, be an ordinary Donbas infantryman. When our flag flutters over us, when we wave at the girls in their BMWs and smile, showing them "call me," when they wave back. When we laugh, like fools, and the passersby in Kramatorsk take off their hats before us, waving them...*

*Lord, I know that this is the life and happiness given by You. We are joyful, my kind God. Keep sending us rain, thunder in the summer heat. We welcome everything. We will wait for your small joys on the war-scorched field.*

*Burn, Lord.*

*On your judgment day, we will judge this sinful land with You, sitting in the pickup truck, waving at pedestrians, rejoicing in the sun and rain. Serhii Hnezdilov, "War on the Peace Street".*

**December 2006.**

These pets are just beasts! I visited the friend's place today. Well, not exactly the friend's more like the former classmate's. So, there we go. She has a dog. I don't know if it's he or she, but it's so annoying! It wagged its tail at the sight of me, as if it wanted to blow me away with an air current. Seriously, what are with these sudden bursts of affection?! Then it stared at me - eye to eye! Just like during an interrogation! And it's waiting for something! What are you waiting for, fur ball? Think I'll feed you? Or teach you the alphabet? Go for a walk, you clueless creature!

Anyway, I came home, tired of dealing with these animals. The day before yesterday, a cat bothered me on the street... It's a good thing there are no animals left on the Earth except dogs and cats! The remaining fifteen and a half animals live in zoos. Well, more like eke out an existence. And I don't go to zoos! Here you go - eat it! So, I have enough of animals even in the fairy tales my grandmother used to read to me when I was a child. There, I've said it.

And overall, nature has gotten on my nerves. Just like in December - the whole school is running after me, yelling "Christmas tree, light up!" Last Monday, one particularly diligent genius came up from behind with a lighter and tried to set my dress on fire - I guess he took the phrase "light up" literally... But he didn't quite get that I would have quartered him! I dragged him outside by the ears - and up against the wall! Then we started pelting him with snowballs! Laughing - it was hilarious!

The guys got involved, and the girls stood on the sidelines... It was fun! And then this guy with the lighter went and complained to the teacher... All the parents were gathered... The main thing is that it affected everyone! Those

who participated! As well as those who watched in horror not knowing how to stop the group of guys with me at the helm...

And what about me? I'm in the clear, no bribes from me. Dad's away on his military business trip. Mom's away on her jewelry business trip. Grandma came for a couple of days - and quickly went back to the settlement, to grandpa. It is for the reason that she's afraid of leaving him alone. If grandpa won't manage on his own. He won't find the well. He won't remember where to turn on the lights. He won't learn how to slice bread...

She just gave me a strict last-minute instruction:

— But you, El, oops, Elizabeth, don't tell your parents that I left you alone. Otherwise, they'll scold me fiercely.

Sure thing! To leave a twelve-year-old child alone at home! Upbrought by the television! Such adults! Who's the more mature one, huh?! I can even find milk in the fridge by myself... By the way, if there's still milk, then somewhere on Earth there are cows as well. Only if this milk isn't artificial. And there are eggs in the fridge too! The same goes for the chickens - there are still some left, squawkers! I just remembered a funny joke: "Do they breed pigs in such quantities because they are such smart and amusing creatures?" Hahaha... Oh, five animals on Earth have been counted! Summing up: cats, dogs, cows, pigs, chickens!

I wonder they really exterminated all the others?

Did this voracious humanity really devour all the other animals? Seriously devoured them? For cripes' sake!..

These are the thoughts that come to mind at midnight for a twelve-year-old child left alone at home without supervision... And then I remember this drill: in bed by nine!

Up at six! Get ready in two minutes! Why on earth should I, a girl, get ready in two minutes?! Am I going to be a soldier in the future? Or will I get ready and walk around in two minutes, watching my husband (I'm talking about the future!) take two hours to get ready? I'll just die of boredom right on the spot! That's it!

Anyway - from where, from what world, did my dad get this name for me - Elizabeth? And you can't figure out from which side to shorten it. The funny thing is that both in kindergarten and in the first grade of school, the adults themselves turned my Elizabeth into El. And that's how I've been El for twelve years now. But what's next? "El Petrivna! Bring me the report for the third quarter!" "El Petrivna, we have an operation in an hour!"

Oh, it's just something with me and operations... I once dreamed of becoming a surgeon. I dared to dream aloud in front of Dad. Got a powerful, generous belt slap and stood in the corner for three hours! I wonder who in their right mind could crawl into that Dad's head and deign to find out that he's sleeping and dreaming about his daughter becoming a violinist? Well, you think something - so open your mouth and say it, otherwise, he hits and doesn't even say why!

Only later did my grandmother tell me that a whole month had passed after that generous disciplinary act. Still calls himself an intelligent person! A major darn it. If only he sneaks into my closet and finds these records - he'll surely knock me with that just and fair belt... The thing is, I've even hidden that dreadful belt already - and he comes back from his business trip and immediately pulls it out... He finds the belt even behind the closet! And then he sits there, content, saying:

— If I hadn't been educating you, where would you have gotten any sense?

So, "beaten" is synonymous with "educated" for him! It somehow occurred to me: educating means imparting life wisdom, answering children's questions. And then you even teach how a child should live and think in order to become a decent human being... But here - no words, just a preliminary warning in the form of a beating! And so you won't cause any trouble later, I'll just do this to you right now... Just like in their soldier jokes:

— Stop! I'm going to shoot!

— I've stopped!

— Shooting!

And how to go on living after that?...

I'm forced to attend private violin lessons! This is really something - a nightmare! The teacher, as soon as Dad appears, literally blossoms like a May rose. And she smells just as sweet. She shows her teeth, her eyes shine:

— Oh, come on, Petr Zakharovych, how can you present gift me again? I'm just doing my job. Your daughter is so talented, so lovely. Obedient! And I think we should increase the number of lessons to five per week. You understand it's a talent, competitions...

And Daddy falls for these! Like a fool, he falls for them. He's a military man, a scout, and he got caught up in such cheap female tricks... And that romp of a teacher has double profits: both from the number of lessons and from Dad's gifts... If only for once he, my dear father would give me something! But that romp of a teacher, as soon as the door closes behind Dad, in the blink of an eye, turns into a scary witch! I swear! Her face becomes so empty, like jelly, her eyes - like two buttons. Even her lips, from a smile, transform into a fierce



grimace, just like in cartoons! Well, no, in real life, it seems to me, it happens more often than in cartoons: people seem to change masks depending on the interlocutor... But this furious teacher simply hates me. Well, I don't know what I did to displease her! She looks at me - almost hisses. She twitches all over, points her finger at the notes - "learn this," and then she turns on her heels and rushes away, making figure eights with her center, heading to the neighboring room with her friend to gather gossip around the neighborhood. She, that romp, is lucky with me. I would even play on rakes, let alone on the violin. As my grandmother says:

— Despite you, El, are not of this world, a talented person is talented in everything!

I certainly don't know what world I am from then. But if I had ever complained about that romp of a teacher to Dad, he would have smacked her with the belt so hard that she'd end up dead.

Although, most likely, judging by Dad's parenting methods, he would generously smack me, and that's it. And he would smile at that teacher with her witch-like face in her mask. Nothing new, another one with masks for every life occasion...

What kind of people are these? No one will show their true face and true emotions! They pretend, they pretend...

I asked Grandma once: why? That mean man in some office scolded her then. She apologized to him. And she smiled. But then at home, she cried with pity and called him a rare tyrant. I was little back then. And the next time I met this man, so arrogant and self-satisfied, I sincerely bid farewell in just this way:

— Goodbye, Uncle Tyrant!

Then, Dad was hitting me... And no one, well, no one protected the little child! And a tearful Grandma, sentimental with her own affairs, did not shed a tear this time, in response to my clear and just question -"why pretend?" -answered:

— That's how it's done.

By whom it's done and why -it's unclear. But these double standards and behind-the-scenes games are called the "law of civilized society." It turns out to be a strange society -lying at every turn.

And I lie. To my friends, that Dad signed me up for karate. Why would I tell them about the violin? That would be shameful!

Instead, I walk with my backpack. And what's in the backpack? A karate uniform! And why karate? So that everyone would be afraid and not mock me! By the way, it worked! In December, only half of the school chases after me yelling, "Hey, Christmas tree, light up!" The other half -what? Right, they're afraid! Afraid I'll beat them! And they're right to be afraid! I really will. I've learned a couple of moves.

I need to hide my writings far away. Dad has already destroyed all my secret diaries. He finds everything behind the cabinet. And tears them up. No, first he reads them carefully, then tears them up, and then hits me. Quite an interaction with a child, isn't it? Well, come back from your business trip; ask me what I'm curious about, what hurts me... No: he tears them up, punishes me, and shouts at me. That's it, decided! I'm hiding my secret writings among regular school notebooks. He definitely won't delve into those -why would he? He's already too literate, and he can only read my school diary. He studies the grades. And in general -everything is written in red, correcting and the smartest ink...

And so -they brush me off along with my questions, like a bothersome fly. When I ask Dad, he sends me to the dictionary; I'm supposed to find all the answers there, not in his priceless life experience. Mom chants a strange mantra to me: "You're a grown girl; you should already understand everything on your own!" I wonder where in my head all this practical knowledge will come from? I don't see answers to my questions around me. If I don't get answers to them -I might mess things up in life... Oh.. It seems like no one cares. Here's what I think. If my parents don't want to teach me the basics, then I'll have to do it myself, probably through my own bitter experience.

It is likely that this will cost me many irreparable mistakes, many dreadful twists of my life in the wrong direction, many irretrievable lost years, and such actions that can't be corrected. And all of this could be avoided, simply - through conversations with me about making the right choices of interests and goals. But it's more convenient for parents to live their own lives rather than to deal with me as their creation, their endeavor. Their precious upbringing boils down to cold punishment and cold round eyes. But neither this nor that helps. Because (oddly enough, isn't it?) knowledge of how to live correctly doesn't arise from these actions in my mind. Alas.

## *A Tale of a Snail.*

*Crawling across the road was a snail. She needed to do so very much. Over on the other side of the road, essentially on another continent for her, lived her relatives. And it was necessary for her to pay them a visit. The snail crossed the road very slowly and grew very, very tired.*

*At that moment, a girl walked by. She picked up the snail and moved her to the other side of the road, where the snail continued her journey. The girl walked away, content that she had helped the snail.*

*For the rest of her life, the snail remembered how her path had been crossed. And unbeknownst to her, she was spared from trouble by the help she received.*

I've developed a new passion here. Rock music! That's where the power lies! I even tried to play it on the violin. It turned out quite decently, but - you can't quite grasp what. Even the teacher's eyes almost popped out of her head. She said she didn't expect that after all those invaluable years she, that beautiful silly one, threw at my peculiar feet, I would be so shamefully out of tune. Oh, she really put her venomous tongue to work on me! I got this romp used to the idea that I understand everything from a half-word and immediately do things as needed. And here you have the result.

And in general, I've long noticed: they value and fuss only with those who need months of explanations, discussions, breaking things down... But those who understand everything right away are ignored and get a failing grade! The requirements are higher than for prodigies! Do you know why they lowered my math grade for the quarter? I wrote the expression  $(-b+a)$  instead of  $(a-b)$ . I just didn't want to scratch it out. The teacher yelled at me that with such a brilliant mind like mine, it's unworthy to make such utterly ridiculous

mistakes. Yet, it wasn't a mistake at all; I simply didn't want to scratch it out... What a pity. I used to like math before all this. Now I've kept only rock music for myself. Forget about these lessons. No need to waste my own nerves on them.

I've learned a song by the band "Fragments of the World":

«I'll vanish into the unknown's domain,  
Where no waiting greets, no return's refrain.  
Forever shattered are bonds once so tight,  
Blood ties now severed, embracing the night.  
Life turns into dust, crumbling unseen,  
Souls fade!  
Enveloped in filth, where we convene,  
Darkness - our guide, where shades cascade!  
Reach your hand to the void, bid farewell's plea.  
Where no scents, no echoes, just endless decree.»...

It's this last part embellished with such beautiful melodic shifts that makes you want to howl it forever. I'm screaming this song at the top of my lungs. The walls are shaking. The ceiling is cracking. I'm singing.

Gradually shifted to the realm of black. Rock abhors greens and pinks! So cunningly I planned it all: growing up, you know! Grandma took me to the store, and I said:

— Grandma, buy me that black sweater over there!

Dad was with me, and I said:

— Dad, I need only black pants! They said so at school!

And Mom, she doesn't even ask about anything. She handed me money and said, -Go, El, enjoy yourself, buy whatever you want! - But one time, Grandma almost revealed my secret -she started to get upset that for a whole year she only saw me in black, nothing else. She rushed to the wardrobe, even opened it, gasped (there's just blackness, impossible to look away!), so I immediately bombarded her with useful and detailed questions about her distant-from-her-at-the-moment grandpa! She got so engrossed and intrigued by the conversation topic distraction that a day earlier, she rushed to her lost grandpa between the garden and the kitchen -just to make sure he didn't get lost in the garden and found everything he needed in the kitchen on time.

And here I sit. Alone. In proud solitude. Though I can't fathom why they called it "proud". I'm writing in my diary, the only one I have left.

By the way, I recently got lucky! Quite immensely lucky. I ended up at a real rock concert! I had been saving up for it for two months. Well, not really saved up. I managed to coax the money out of my mom. For a new skirt. And my grandma bought it for me. Then I showed it to my mom. What do you mean, what I showed? Not my grandma, of course. My mom, my grandma's daughter, she's been keeping an eye on her for a hundred years. Although... a hundred years? How old is my mom really? I'm twelve, she was nineteen... Oh, she's thirty-one. Of my harsh days companion, the aged crone of mine! That's how the classics describe such women.

Will I really be thirty-one someday? Will I sit there, with the same dull face, boringly listening to the droning words of my tedious husband? No way. I'd rather be cast away.

Or I'll become a blazing and rapidly fading rock star. They're essentially so crazy over there; I've seen it for myself! Oh, what a concert it was! What an incredibly massive crowd gathered! It all started two hours late. That living biomass outside the stadium gates was moving, breathing, shouting, "Let us in!" And the guards were just staring blankly overhead, refusing to let anyone through. Then, finally, after two hours, the stadium gates did open! And the crowd surged in! What a wild crush ensued... Girls were being knocked down and trampled upon. Over their legs, over their heads... Oh, now I understand the expression: "Stop at nothing!" I experienced such horror in those ten minutes... I stepped on people, on living people with my own feet, it couldn't have been any other way, they were all pushing... The wave of the crowd swept me against the wall like a grain of sand, pressing me helplessly against the concrete... I stand there, and they're smearing me against that concrete, I can't even breathe -they're crushing me so mercilessly, like adults would... Then, from the side, someone barks in my ear with a familiar voice:

— ...

Well, an indecent word. I only recognized my classmate by his voice. I glanced at him sideways -and couldn't recognize him at all: covered in tattoos, with a mohawk. I also barked in his ear:

— Hey!

I'm a lady and I don't use indecent language! Even though we were on our way to the rock concert! It seems Vital Zoland recognized me only by my voice as well. That evening, my emerald mohawk and the dark smudges under my eyes scared me too when I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror as I passed by. I wanted to run -I was so frightened!

And Vital recognized me by my voice as well. At first, he looked down a little, searching for El in the air. He didn't recognize her in me! But then... In short, he recognized me and saved me. From being crushed by the terrifying crowd against the cold, heartless concrete.

I was standing there with my back to the wall, embedded in the concrete, wearing away against it slowly. That's when Vital found me, half-buried in the concrete. He pressed his hands against the wall around me and stepped back a little. The crowd was pushing against him -he resisted, only grunting in response. And he looked into my eyes. Apparently, he was gathering mental strength for such an unexpected feat. In short, those were the furious and almost lifeless ten minutes in my life that unfolded.

And we started shouting at the top of our lungs along with our idols, so that all the gods could hear us and obey us:

«Oh, your love is so wild, like wine it flowed!

Why my cheek is marked deep, a scar it showed!

They stitched up that wound with a needle's glide!

Oh, your love, so jealous, fierce like a tide!

Your mama shared secrets, with me she spoke:

If her son strikes me, then I'm cherished, stoked!

And with your love I share, to the world I bide,

From you, a unique gift, a scar's pride. »

And the concert turned out to be incredibly cool! Only one funny thing happened -the lead singer, for some reason stepping back on the stage, got tangled in a mess of multiple cables and cords, and ended up flat on the slippery floor... He,



in his black attire, fell in one direction, while his black microphone did in the other. And the playback was singing with a human voice... Well, let's forgive that. All of this was in the center of the stadium; we were far away, as if we didn't even notice.

Vital Zoland escorted me home. Now I have my own personal pocket hero!

## *Tale of the Fleas*

*Once upon a time, there lived fleas on a dog. The dog was patient and only occasionally chased away these fleas when the nasty bites became utterly unbearable.*

*But the fleas, sensing their newfound freedom, grew audacious. They formed entire colonies -digging channels, creating massive holes in the dog's skin, constructing some sort of dwellings, and drilling deep pits...*

*The dog endured for a very, very long time, but eventually, it turned to a human to complain. And the human freed the dog from the fleas.*

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My mother found my writings. She cried. She read. She looked at herself in the mirror. And cried again. Later I realized why she was sobbing: she read about the "ancient old woman." She looked at me in a strange way, asked with pity:

— Am I really that ancient and old?"

Go ask the mirror! What can I say? And in general, it was her first question to me in my twelve years of life with her. I was unexpectedly stunned and answered truthfully:

— Yes!

Well, that's my opinion. I have the right to have my precious own opinion. And where did she lose her cheerfulness in her adulthood? Children are cheerful. She is gloomy. So, that makes her an old woman. Such a conclusion suggests itself. No other way about it. She completely forgot where that smile went and on what occasions it even appears.

Then, my mom looked at me strangely, then just as oddly at herself in the mirror. I started to twist the truth (remember, in this society, you have to lie to survive!):

— Why are you asking me, the little one? For me, anyone who's two years older is already ancient pre-millennial old folks! And you -even more so!

She seemed kind of... foggy, maybe. All her emotions revolve around thoughts of going to work now. Then she'll come home -prepare food. Then tidy up... I wonder if that's all she thinks about?

Once, I had the misfortune to ask her what she dreams about. A whole waterfall poured out: she wants to tear down the partition between the kitchen and the living room and make

a bar counter, so guests can come and drink liqueurs. She wants to turn the child's room into a home office for Dad and put you in a room with a balcony and get built-in furniture there. My bed -up to the ceiling... In short, I had been listening for two hours and realized that only large wardrobes, walls, and balconies fit into my mom's head.

Is this what adults dream about? Such fervent devotion to walls and furniture! I always thought that one should dream about something else. For example about the development of relationships, for instance. Well, I actually don't even know what... I wasn't taught that, and I'm not very perceptive myself... Well, I guess I'll start dreaming about furniture too.

...And Mom keeps crying all the time...

...And Dad, as always, is on a business trip...

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I was strolling down the street. And not just strolling! I was flaunting my emerald green mohawk. I had drawn on my eyeliner -well, it was so pitch black that it covered half of my face. Like a mask! So there I was, walking like the ultimate cool kid. And then I see my teacher -the violinist. What a ridiculous sight. She was carrying this enormous bouquet of roses, jewelry bags, and perfume. She's baring her teeth, trying to use her gelatinous bosom to invade the personal space of her equally infatuated companion. And that bouquet in her hands is huge; it's a real challenge to hold onto it while trying to impress her companion with her bosom... But she manages it wonderfully and professionally. The guy, like a sheep, is practically melting in adoration beside her, his face adorned with a mask of masculinity and dignity...

Of course, that romp didn't recognize me. I was in disguise too -as a future rock star. Brace yourselves, world! I'm soaring to the top at lightning speed!

I walked about fifty meters. And something turned me around. I remembered that the man had very familiar shoes -I had just sprayed them with emerald green hair dye for my mohawk this morning... I turned back.

With the teacher was... my father.

And he wore the exalted mask of masculinity and dignity. A true appreciator of feminine beauty. I had never seen him like this before.

He didn't recognize me either.

We didn't recognize each other...

People in masks don't recognize each other and pass by one another...

**January 2007.**

Mother calls Dad at work. She's apparently fallen ill. Quite severely. Not with the flu. And they're sending her to the hospital. And Dad, as usual, is on one of his endless business trips. Going out with a goat. The man's a shepherd, not a major. And he's taken all of Mom's salary for his goats on the pasture. Or rather, six of Mom's salaries from the joint trinket box.

Something happened. Mom fell silent over there. And I heard a muffled thud. I'm going to see what's going on.

...In short, here's the situation. It turns out that over the past four years, they haven't sent Dad on any of those endless business trips. This was mom, having a bad fall on our ill-fated floor that found out about it from his superiors, managed to get through on the phone, and promptly fainted from such news. Now, the inevitable question arises: where is this Dad of ours going? And where does he live now?

Could it be that he's involved with the romp-teacher (goat)? But we won't tell Mom about it -we'll spare her.

I drove the sick woman, who managed to knock her head against every protruding corner, to the hospital. Did it with my own money, by the way -I had saved up for a fantastic guitar. Paid the doctors, bought the medicine -in short, carried out the duties of a husband who's supposedly on an endless business trip.

And what do you think? Mom has been in the hospital for ten days now. I've almost run out of all the money I begged

with blood and sweat from every close relative. And Mom's condition is deteriorating. Probably due to heart sinking. And Dad still hasn't shown up!

Oh, he's appeared. He's back from his never-ending business trip. Three weeks of absence. And he acts as if nothing has happened. Walking around, whistling. Naturally, he beat me. Right away. He asked where Mom was. On the third day! I wonder what cultured words I could use to describe what he truly is?

Upon learning that Mom was in the hospital, he just said "okay" and went to work. I, naïvely, thought he would rush to her in the hospital! So much for "okay" - there goes my daydreaming... I went to see her the next day -and guess who hadn't visited her? Dad! He didn't even bother asking which hospital she was in... Or what exactly was her illness, so he could specify the hospital department... Here I am, a child, forced to delve into the intricacies of hematology and nephrology...

And he didn't leave any money -off he went again somewhere... Now I'm sitting here -crying: what will me, a twelve-year-old child, live on from now on? And how will I ever afford to treat my bruised and battered mom, both physically and emotionally...

The queen who lives many planets away, my grandmother, deigned to come. She started to burden me, already burdened with hospitals and the dreadful words of medical education, with chores: oh, there's so much housework to be done, oh, the garden and the orchard and the blue sky. You, with your carefree head, think about it yourself! What housework? Your own daughter, born and raised by you, has been in the hospital for a whole month! Of course, she didn't leave any money -Grandma never has any money. And

if she does, it's only what Mom gives her. I suspect she came for the money.

Oh, I've figured it out! I'll go to Mom's workplace. No mohawk or black arrows. I'll leave that image at home for a rest.

So, I entered her jewelry store. There are about a hundred employees there. I stand in the middle of the hall and with all the fear in my throat, I shout at the top of my lungs:

— Hey, you people! Your coworker is dying in the hospital! Couldn't at least one of you come to visit her?

All hundreds of them rushed over. They stared at me. Their boss stands there, pointing a finger at me, as if wondering who I am.

I reply:

— I'm El, and you are twats!

All of a sudden, they all remembered whose child they had called a tree. ("El" - is a fir-tree in Russian.) Apparently, no one bothered to find out where my almost dying mom is without any help and without Dad's presence. They simply fired her and slapped her with a massive fine for violating the employment contract. Some slow-witted one told me. She was giving the boss dirty looks.

Oh, how I yelled! How dare you fire people in hospitals! And couldn't you have bothered to make a simple phone call - to inquire in a humane manner about the actual situation? In short, my ultra-high frequencies nearly burst everyone's eardrums. But I guess I'm a champion! Right there in front of me, they reinstated my mom at work, provided compensation, sick leave, and vacation pay! Hooray, I finally have the long-awaited and much-needed money at this moment! Now I can



pay for all the medications at the hospital! Mom needs all the necessary things and much more shopping, and I also need to hide money from Dad -because he has money for gifts to the goats, but not a penny for my own cherished and importantly alive, mother's medicine...

By the way, I learned there at Mom's workplace that her salary is four times greater than Dad's. Yet in our household, it seemed Dad was the one managing the money -realistically, he was the one who constantly left the family without a penny.

**March 2007.**

Hooray! Mom finally got out of the hospital. She was completely drained, a thin and blue figure. Her eyes seemed deliberately extinguished. One would think there's no worse - stop, no more. No worries, I'll definitely cheer her up!

Well... Trying to cheer her up... She's stuck on Dad...

At this point, merriment is truly out of the question... As it turned out, our Dad has another family. He's living there. Not with the goat. With someone else from his extensive pasture. And he took all of Mom's substantial money there. He has three children there... That's right.

The teacher came to make a scene. She shouted that our Dad is HERS. And that she'll take him away from us because Mom is all unkempt, unadorned, without jelly-like bosom, and a woman should take care of herself in salons and, in general, look after herself.

But Mom did take care of Dad, he was like her baby. She looked after only Dad. There wasn't enough of her for the both of them.

Let alone for three, if you count me as a human being.

The teacher finally understood, and now she's convinced herself that Dad had every moral right to leave behind a crocodile like my mother and go to such a well-groomed beauty with a gelatinous bosom, like the witch's façade.

Mom remained silent.

And then, just as quietly, she handed a note with Dad's address to the teacher where he has three children.

And then, after the teacher left, she fainted again.

**April 2007.**

Mother is in the hospital again. But something inside her broke -whether the hook on which she hung on to Dad like a long-forgotten, dusty, and already decaying jacket... Or maybe the tree of her love for him dried up and split in half... But she came out of the hospital cheerful.

And while she was resting there, getting rid of hooks, five more women came to us. Like - well-groomed loves of Dad! I, following my mother's example, sent them all to a well-known address where Dad has three children.

Let them have their fun.

And I turned thirteen. A dreadful number! I'll walk around saying I'm fourteen and won't tell anyone how old I really am. But I still play the violin -I enjoy that activity!

Ha-ha. Dad came once. As if nothing had happened. Like: I'm back, so rejoice. Mom just grinned thoughtfully. And remained silent.

I immediately caught on to why he came back! Mom's salary is four times bigger, after all! His small change won't get him far with his brood... But there's the mother of those kids, and a whole herd of goats - they all demand money...

Mom went into another room, and he went straight to the jewelry box!

I was like an empty space to him, he didn't even hesitate. But I am stubborn and prudent, and I took out all the money from the box before he arrived... He moved to another box, where Mom's gold is kept. And she has so much of it, all with precious gems; she's a jeweler after all! But there's nothing there either. Seeing his herd of goats, I hid everything! And I changed the lock in the house. That's how cunning I am.

Dad is just losing it! As soon as he started closing shelves - they even fell off from the impacts. In short, he got aggressive - started throwing everything on the floor, stomping on things, and then he started kicking my mom and me out of the apartment. Like, all my (!) money was hidden, all my (!) valuables are hidden from me, so go away, you two dependents.

But the apartment is actually my mom's, she bought it with her own hard-earned money. And he's kicking us out; he's completely lost his mind!

The neighbors called the police. After all, he's a major. So he must be right. They kicked my mom and me out of the apartment. And dad put his violinist goat in there.

**June 2007.**

Hooray! I'm going to the settlement! The first time in my life. It's always been Grandma coming to us. And I've never

seen Grandpa in my life. Mom is currently dealing with buying a new apartment. And the divorce from this...

My initial feeling about the settlement is space. In the city, it's just all high-rise buildings. I didn't even know there was, for example, a sky. And sunset. And sunrise. And a river. And the scent of grass. Not just the smell of car exhaust and the stench of melting asphalt. And, it turns out animals have been preserved in settlements. Those that I've already seen: chickens, geese, rabbits, cows, pigs. Yes, there are also cats and dogs. But what I liked the most were the rabbits! I take my jump rope, make a leash for the rabbit, and we walk around the streets like that! The old ladies burst out laughing from watching us.

And why not, one might ask? The rabbit is interested in everything around too! It grazes, picks grass along the way, and looks into my eyes. And its ears twitch so endearingly.

I felt cold in the evening. He crawled onto my feet, and as soon as he sensed it, he snuggled close - warming me up! I simply melt when I see him. Oh, how I love him! So much love! I never thought that it could be fun with animals.

Not with all of them, of course. I'm terribly afraid of cows! When they pass by slowly, especially this one with horns curved towards the sky, I immediately hide behind the fence and tremble! And this dark-brown one with horns, she approaches the fence, tilts her massive head towards it - and breathes on me! Through the fence! Now I know for sure that I have a heart, and it can sink all the way down to my feet.

And at Grandma's place, there are so many delicious things growing! Apricots and cherries are ripe, and mulberries and strawberries! How incredibly tasty it all is! I've been

indulging myself, savoring all those juicy and tender fruits! But why, oh why, hasn't Grandma brought me a single berry, not once? She goes back to the city empty-handed, yet from us, her bag is full of gifts for Grandpa: dragging, panting...

I, in the morning, sitting on an apricot, was throwing pits around so that new apricots would grow around this beauty too, and then my grandma says to me:

— Come down.

I, in protest: But it's so tasty!

And she says to me:

— We only use berries for jam! You can't eat them!

This really shocked me. They're delicious now, and if you cook them, all the vitamins will be destroyed! I gave my grandma a whole lecture about enzymes, which are those globally advertised vitamins that are destroyed after fifty degrees Celsius. And you're left with a mix that's completely devoid of vitamins, plus sugar. Grandma listened attentively, but after the lecture, she chased me off the apricot tree, grumbling:

— Such a clever one you've become! Go back to your city and show off your smarts there! - She said with the prohibition to eat the berries, they're for jam for Grandpa.

I don't care! Here, kind people plant fruit-bearing trees instead of fences, along the perimeter of their one-hectare plots. All these lands have been passed down to these people through inheritance -from generation to generation. Trees also grow here for centuries, continuing their lineage from one pit to another. If you think deeply, it's the perfect way of life: all the produce hangs on the trees, and sometimes perfectly ripe fruits fall right onto your head. And if it falls into the grass