
Chapter 1

About relatives and rules of survival in the world of adults

Maxim didn't sleep all night or, as his great-grandmother used to say, he didn't shut his eyes. And although he couldn't sleep, he was dreaming. Or rather, not even dreaming. In his head, or as his grandmother used to say, before his mind's eye, the course of the next day's events was unfolding. The course of events, or as his uncle Sasha used to say, the script, had been discussed with all his relatives so many times, it had been clarified and changed so often that even Maxim's grandfather, who was very open-minded to someone else's opinion, couldn't stand it any longer and pronounced, "Let the boy decide for himself what and how." Only then did Mom and Dad, followed by the other relatives, accept Maxim's leadership and he compiled the final version of the scenario.

It was a great success. It could be explained firstly by the fact that Maxim, as the saying goes, grew out of his kid's pants – from the last year his age was expressed in double digits, and he was gradually approaching the mysterious and so fascinating world of teenagers, who have almost as many rights as adults but bear less responsibilities. Secondly, the foreign guest who was going to arrive this Friday had been

invited by Maxim; that is, Maxim was the host of the event. Under the pressure of these two circumstances, the relatives had promised that at least for a month they would treat him as a reliable and independent person.

It seemed that he should be sleeping peacefully and have no worries. But it is necessary to understand Maxim's relatives. Every one of them had assumed himself/herself to be a genius, and even worse under the circumstances, thought it necessary to meddle in the lives of others and dispense his/her ingenious advices and admonitions. Since Maxim was the youngest in the family, he was on the receiving end of all that wisdom descending through the generations down on him.

Maxim was a well-mannered boy and believed that the elders should be obeyed and respected. Sasha had a different opinion on the matter. A smart tactic, he would say, is to never contradict adults and under no circumstances discredit their invaluable experience, never mind that it was suitable for a historical museum only. They must be agreed with, nodded, thanked for the advice, and then simply ignored. He called this behavior The First Rule of Survival in the adult world.

Although Sasha was his uncle, he was still a teenager, though with solid experience, and next year he would be expelled from this privileged community due to his age. Maxim was sorry that Sasha would soon turn into an adult with all the shortcomings of adulthood. But for now, Uncle Sasha, according to his mother and Maxim's grandmother, still possessed a childish spontaneity and in every possible way helped Maxim survive in tough, not to say cruel to the children world of adults, who wrote many clever and humane laws governing children and even created a science called Juvenile Justice Jurisprudence, but treated children as a lower, albeit sweet, but still lower and oppressed group. Just the fact that special laws were drawn up for children testifies that adults don't consider them to be full-fledged people, and this smelled, according to Sasha, like discrimination towards children. Since Sasha himself suffered from this oppression for long nineteen years of his life, he invented many ways, formulated a lot of rules, and created a special theory of survival in the adult world, gradually instilling this wisdom into his nephew.

The Second Rule of Survival in the adult world, also called face the fact, was not to inform adults about your intentions but to make your own well-considered decision, consistently executing it, and only then report the fact of its implementation. Adults, in order to not lose their face and not to show the child that the situation was out of their control, were supposed to take this for granted and to give permission to it in hindsight. Exactly as the king in the “Little Prince” by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry did by dispensing smart orders to his subjects to do what they had already started to do before the king’s order, for what, by the way, everyone considered the king to be very wise.

Sasha had the sovereignty necessary for such behavior. For example, when he announced that he had left the medical school and became a professional yachtsman, all the relatives set before that fact, or rather, set on that fact, for he informed about his decision on the deck of a beautiful racing yacht. All of them wished the team of five guys, led by the captain, that is, Sasha, great success in the upcoming races across the Atlantic. Great-Grandmother showed an exceptional enthusiasm because Sasha called the yacht “Beautiful Marquise,” as she thought, in honor of her goat, Marquise.

Maxim understood Sasha’s theory theoretically, but he failed to realize even the simplest First Rule because he always said what he thought, openly defended his thoughts, and as a result, he had many problems with the adults. Sometimes, Maxim felt that his patience would explode, and he would finally leave his genius relatives and run off to the edge of the world, to some uninhabited island, because the cup of his patience was beginning to overflow.

The most annoying, and frankly speaking, useless advices would begin with the words, “Maxim, when I was your age ...” And then he would have to listen to what Great-Grandmother did in Prehistoric Times, or the Grandmother in the Stone Age, or his parents in the Middle Ages. They didn’t understand what a civilizational gorge separated them. Hard to believe, at the time when they were born and growing up, there were no mobile phones and no Internet! It was impossible for Maxim to imagine such a society.



Let us take, for example, such a prehistoric phenomenon as correspondence. In order to transfer the information to a distance, it was necessary to put it on paper, to buy an envelope, a stamp, to take the letter to the post office, from where it was forwarded by horse, car, train, plane or dog sled to the specified address. After that, the recipient repeated the whole process of writing and sending a letter, and in a few weeks, months or years, you received an unexpected answer because you completely forgot what you wrote, asked or wanted. Then a telephone connection was created, but it was so flawed that we can only laugh about it now. Either the telephone in the phone booth was broken, or it angrily “gulped” your coins, or the connection was interrupted. Even that was possible only if the person you wanted to talk to had a phone installed in the house. And if not? Then your only choice was the tedious letter correspondence. How much time

mankind has wasted, and how many millions of trees were destroyed for the paper!

Sometimes, Maxim felt sorry for adults because they were born so long ago. But there's nothing one can do about it – nobody can choose the place and time of birth. In any case, it isn't possible yet. That's why Maxim tried to compensate his relatives for their difficult childhood with his politeness and attention.

Maxim was lucky to be born in a very interesting time – the time of the information explosion. The only thing that bothered him was that he was born a bit late, and he was afraid that by the time he becomes an adult, the explosion would be over, and it would be too late to join it and contribute. It just happened that every time a revolutionary idea dawned on him and he was beginning to plan its implementation, he would find out that this idea was already realized by someone from the adult world. This was all the more unbearable because of his relatives who, instead of listening to the reflections of a true genius and at least occasionally putting his ideas into practice, terrorized Maxim with instructions and advices. The only one who didn't give advice was the Grandfather. He understood that every generation should go over its pains and gain own experience, for which Maxim loved him more than anyone else.

The rest of the relatives could be just impossible. Especially after they found out about the foreign visit, everyone just surpassed themselves in the art of interfering in Maxim's personal affairs.

Chapter 2

About childhood fantasies and love at first sight

This is how it all began. In the spring, Maxim's homeroom teacher announced that as a part of the cultural values exchange program that is taking place between their school and a school in Munich, an exchange of students from these schools was arranged. The so-called exchange students will be staying at students' homes in the hosting country where they will be immersed into and absorb cultural values of the hosting country and then bring those values back home. As a first step in the exchange of values, and therefore exchange of children, ten students will be coming over in August during summer holidays. These students will be staying in the homes of the ten best students of their class and will be shown the achievements of Ukrainian culture. Maxim, as the best student in the class was granted the honor to be the first to select his guest.

Maxim was smart enough not to tell anyone at home for the time being, and instead, acted according to Sasha's second rule, that is, to make adults face the fact.

He brought home a folder with ten files in transparent file holders. Each of them contained a color photograph and a brief biography of the

Munich's student. Seven boys and three girls. Everyone smiled affably at Maxim, and Maxim smiled at everyone in return. All of them seemed very nice and charming, and when Maxim smiled for the ninth time, he felt confused, just the way he was when he was choosing a toy from a catalog, that on the picture looked pretty and tempting but in reality turned out to be very disappointing.



But in this case, it wasn't about a toy, it was about a living person, a personality who, in case of a wrong choice, wouldn't be exchanged with a receipt. No, thought Maxim, his teacher didn't act very pedagogically offering such a system of choice. Perhaps, it would be better ...

Maxim didn't finish his thought. As he turned the ninth page, looked at the last, tenth photo, he held his breath. He had never believed in love at first sight, and all the more so looking at a photograph, although his great-grandmother assured that she fell in love with her third husband just like that. Maxim only laughed when she narrated this sentimental story – how she caught her breath and felt a stab in her heart, and all this only from one glance at a photograph of a handsome officer riding a black stallion, whom she loved from that moment on for her whole life. Now, almost a century later, Maxim looked at the photo of a girl, caught his breath and felt a stab in his heart. Maxim couldn't say categorically that it was love, because he had never fell in love before. But he liked the girl immensely.

The choice was made, and the relatives, set before the fact, agreed that the girl looked charming and that communicating with someone of the same age should be good for Maxim. In the opinion of the relatives, this visit was very timely because, according to their theory, Maxim was in a threatening transition age – between fantasies of a childhood and disillusionments of puberty, so to speak, and in this transitional state he needed a positive external factor.

By childhood fantasies they meant the visit of his friend Ledvedik, who came to Maxim from a parallel world last year, and with whom Maxim had experienced so many exciting adventures and heard so many incredible stories. To this time, Maxim regretted that he had told the parents about it. Or rather, his parents forced him to tell everything because he was so sad, and in their words, demanded sincere friends who would listen to him, understand, support at a difficult moment, and so on, and so on ...

Don't you ever believe adults when they try to get into your soul! Parents did listen attentively, and then Mom dragged Maxim to be examined by a psychoanalyst. That is how they understood and supported! They were about to label Maxim a psycho, and to avoid such a fate, Maxim had to admit aloud that Ledvedik was the fruit of his childhood fantasy.

Ledvedik's visit could've been confirmed by at least three witnesses – Great-Grandmother, Sasha, and a neighbor of the holiday cottage, a boy named Mark. Although Ledvedik stayed with Maxim secretly and in

every possible way tried to avoid publicity, the publicity did happen when they conducted an experiment on cloning the mammoth and everything got out of control, that is, both the experiment and the mammoth. The abovementioned persons were more or less aware of Ledvedik's existence. But Mark's family sold their holiday cottage, and contact with him terminated. Great-Grandmother, when Maxim tried to talk about Ledvedik and the mammoth, would rub her temples, talk about her old age (absolutely unheard of excuse for her!) as well as her sclerosis (although at the same time, she remembered exactly how many, when, and which of her cups or statuettes Maxim broke in eleven years of his existence.) Sasha, who was his best friend, referred to the "black out," that is, selective memory loss, and this memory loss happened exactly at the time when they conducted the experiment with Ledvedik. This could've been explained by the fact that Sasha also got in a lot of trouble with his relatives and his psychoanalyst.

Since the day Ledvedik returned with a mammoth to his parallel world, more than a year has passed, and all that time Maxim never doubted the fact of Ledvedik's existence. The best confirmation of this fact would've been Ledvedik himself, who promised to visit him exactly in a year. But a year has passed, then a month, and another month, and Maxim felt disheartened. He himself began to doubt whether this Ledvedik existed at all or was inspired by some computer game.

The unfulfilled expectation was becoming unbearable, and the anguish grew so deep that finally he began to believe in a menacing transition state between the world of childhood fantasies and the real world of adults, where he, according to the adults, was located, and Maxim was simply glad to pass it as soon as possible with the help of a positive external factor. What would be a better factor than a green-eyed girl with hair the color of fallen maple leaves, with a mysterious smile and such a romantic name – Ka-ro-lin.

Maxim's melancholy as if evaporated, and he, and all relatives after him, began to think about how to demonstrate to the charming guest the achievements of the Ukrainian culture. Then came a flow of tips – opera and drama theaters, the philharmonic, the conservatory, museums,

exhibitions, vernissages, and rock festivals. This long list of cultural and educational institutions was drawn up at a family dinner, and in truth, only the last item, that is, the rock festivals offered by Sasha, provoked Maxim's enthusiasm. Unfortunately, with a margin of one vote, this item was deleted from the list, after which Maxim began to doubt the flawlessness of the democratic voting system. Open voting, in particular, because his dad, under the watchful eye of the mom, and then his grandfather, under the watchful eye of the grandmother, both guiltily smiling, abstained from voting, and three women defeated Maxim and Sasha.

Now that you have learned a little about Maxim's relatives, you can understand why he didn't sleep and was worried that night. But one question bothered him most of all – what will he feel when he meets Karolin? And if it turns out to be love, will it be mutual?

Chapter 3

About a slightly broken leg and a slightly broken mobile

Six years ago, for his birthday, Maxim received a shiny black piano as a present from his grandmother, and in addition to it – the best private teacher in Kiev who, over his dozens-of-years career, educated a dozen and a half pianists-virtuosos, laureates of all conceivable international competitions. This teacher was supposed to foster in Maxim something worthwhile, so that he would get some laureate title to the delight of his beloved grandmother.

Grandmother always achieved her goals and hoped she would live to see that joyful moment when her grandson-virtuoso would appear on the stage of a conservatory, or a philharmonic, or at least some summer theater, and accompanied by the symphony orchestra, would play, or as Sasha said, brake out Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No 1. Firstly, Grandmother was a music lover and was very fond of the wonderful Ukrainian theme of blind lirnyks that the composer used in his unsurpassed concert. Secondly, Grandmother was very ambitious and wanted her grandson to fulfill her ambitions, since pedagogical efforts towards her children – Maxim’s mom and Sasha – were in vain. As Sasha kept reiterating, from the first day of

his life, Maxim served as a “blank page” for his grandmother to be filled in a calligraphic handwriting with an important information, unlike the previous two drafts.

And the Grandmother’s dream came true – Maxim sat on stage of the London Royal Theater Covent Garden at the grand piano “Steinway” in a smart tail-coat and tight lacquered leather shoes, and the world-famous conductor waited for a slight nod of his head, the baton ready to put into action the orchestra comprised of the world’s best musicians. Maxim, as if jumping into cold water, took a deep breath, nodded to the conductor, and struck the keys. The beginning was easy and triumphant, the eyes of the conductor, the orchestra, and Grandmother, who was sitting in the box next to the queen herself, were shining with delight. Maxim was overcome by lightness and joy, but then ... he stopped because he forgot what to play next. The orchestra abated; spectators held their breaths. Maxim began all over again. Then he forgot again. Then he started again. And this nightmare lasted until the saving bell rang, announcing the intermission.

Maxim woke up, heard the phone ring, and stumbling in his too long pajama pants, ran into the hallway.

“Hey, Maxim!” Sasha said way too joyfully. “Why aren’t you answering your phone?”

Only now Maxim realized why he had that nightmare. On the occasion of the school year graduation, his grandmother bought him a mobile phone of the latest model and recorded this melody of blind lirnyks on it, in order to imprint in the grandson’s subconscious the goal that he should achieve.

“Hi! Where are you?” Maxim asked a little frightened because, according to his script, by this time Sasha should’ve already opened the door with his keys, woke his nephew if he overslept, and took him to the airport to meet Karolin.

Sasha was a very reliable and punctual person, and if he wasn’t at the appointed place at the appointed time, that is, at ten at Maxim’s house, it could mean some kind of a large-scale catastrophe like the Great Flood, the Martians invasion, or the Tunguska meteorite’s direct hit of Sasha’s car.

“Chief, it’s like that. Just don’t get scared. I’m here waiting for a tire.”



“Why should I be afraid?” Maxim, still not completely awake, didn’t understand anything. “Have you punctured a tire on the way?”

“You see, I was running past my treadmill, stumbled, fell, hit my leg and broke it a bit. Just what your great-grandma says: sport isn’t good for health.”

Ran, stumbled, fell, hit and broke a bit, Maxim repeated, and this would’ve made a funny rhyme, if it weren’t for Sasha’s a bit broken leg and Maxim’s ruined scenario.

“What leg, left or right?” Maxim asked out of politeness because there is no difference for the legs.

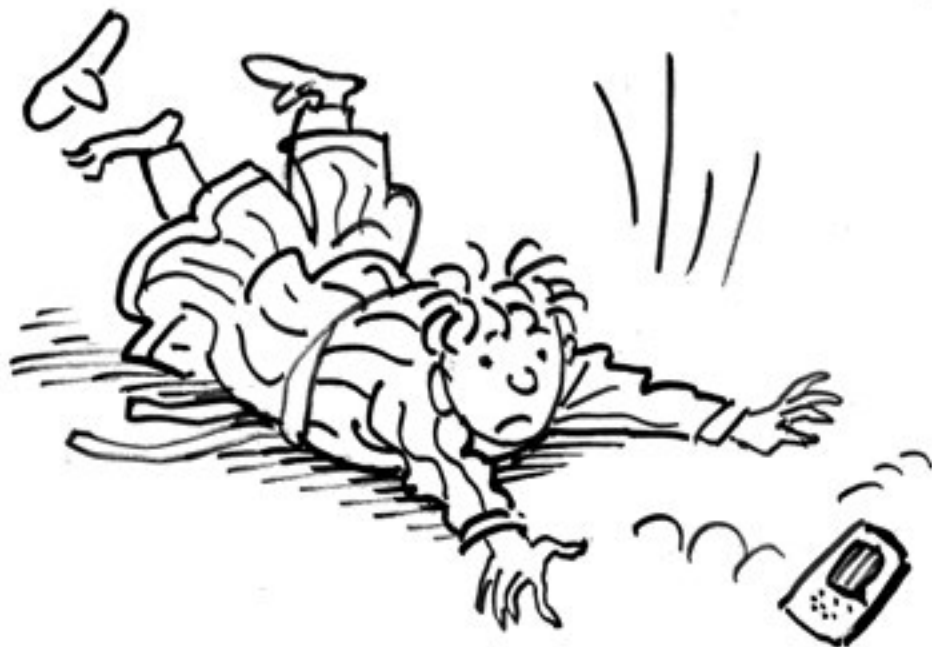
It would’ve been very important if he broke a hand. Like when his classmate Oles broke his right hand, he didn’t write anything for six weeks, and when his neighbor Marinka broke her left hand, she didn’t have any excuses. But with the leg – whichever is broken, you must walk on crutches.

“It seems to be the left one,” Sasha’s answer wasn’t making sense. “I’m sorry I cannot help. About the leg – not a word because women will be worried.”

Maxim put down the phone, and stumbling in long pants of his new pajama, went back to his room to call one of the nine classmates who must’ve been already going to pick up their guests at the airport. On the way to his room, he reflected on the conversation with Sasha, and the longer he pondered over it, the stranger it seemed to him. The conversation and Sasha himself. If a person breaks his leg, he either breaks it or doesn’t break it. There is no such thing as “a little bit,” and Sasha, who studied at a medical college for two semesters, should’ve been more precise with this diagnosis. Even if there was such a medical term as “a bit broken leg,” being able to determine which one, left or right, couldn’t possibly be difficult even without a special training because a person is not a centipede, for which it would be difficult to answer such a question. But most of all, Maxim was troubled about the tire that Sasha supposedly waited for. If a person has a broken leg, then the matter of repairing the car becomes secondary. Clearly there was a good reason why Sasha wasn’t making sense: either he is in a state of shock or he was actually kidnapped by those Martians Maxim had just thought about. Things like that happened to Maxim before – sometimes something incredible comes to his mind and – voila! – it has strangely materialized. And it concerned, unfortunately, unpleasant events only.

Maxim looked at his watch and realized that time was running out. He ran to his room, hoping that Sasha wasn’t kidnapped by the Martians but was simply in a shock. Maxim grabbed the mobile from

the table, his legs completely entangled in his pants, he stumbled, fell, and his mobile, hopping, skipping like a ball, jumped into the hallway.



Oh, thought Maxim, it seems I broke my leg too. There was a legend in his family, that there is no time to retell, but the story is that in their family all the troubles happen twice, that is, in pairs. It was a family curse, inherited from a great-great-great-great-grandmother, who passed it down through inheritance to all her descendants. True or not, but this time she was out of luck: the curse didn't reach Maxim. He got up, touched his left leg, then the right, to make sure that they were both okay.

He went to pick up his new mobile and to select from the menu someone from his classmates who received the high honor of hosting a foreign guest, or, at the very least, one of the relatives, all of whom seemed to have disappeared. He pulled the mobile phone from under the chair and ... he realized that the double trouble did come true. Mobile was like Sasha's leg, slightly broken. That is, it functioned, as

a new mobile phone of the latest model should, but when it fell, all the phone numbers recorded by Maxim were wiped out. All with no exception! And he had thrown in the trash the phonebook presented by his great-grandmother last year, as a thing that is not needed in the twenty-first century.

Help was not going to come from anywhere. Mom ran to the hairdresser to do her hair, manicure, and pedicure to be ready for the arrival of an important guest. Dad was at the anniversary conference on the existence of aliens. Grandfather took out the beehives “to the resort,” that is, to buckwheat fields. Grandmother, whose firm won a million-dollar tender with the Japanese, was meeting today these Japanese with their tender. All of them had to appear, according to the Maxim’s scenario, much later.

Maxim stood in the middle of the apartment all alone and realized what Robinson Crusoe felt when he was thrown onto an uninhabited island – helpless despair due to the complete informational cutoff from civilization.

Chapter 4

About the fantastic splendor of August and summer collection of dresses

It seems it was fated for Maxim to eventually get help from his great-grandmother who had been the first of his relatives to offer to take him to the airport to meet the guest. Maxim changed into brand new jeans and a trendy shirt that had been prepared for the occasion and went into the hallway, where next to the phone there was a fat phone book, with the numbers of the old-fashioned telephone sets that were standing in the homes tethered by the cord to the land line.

Maxim dialed the great-grandmother's phone number. In this weather, it was absolutely hopeless. She probably sat in her garden and admired the "fantastic splendor of August," in her words, the best in the last fifty years.

Maxim retrieved his bike from the balcony. When he saw that the elevator was not working, Maxim became totally convinced that the circumstances and technology had joined forces against him.

"What a sporty boy," in a friendly tone commented the concierge, called by everyone Aunty Zina, who was sitting on the bench by the house and petted the tailless cat Boomer behind the ears. "Sport is health."

Oh sure, health, Maxim thought bitterly. Nobody left any money for the poor guy to be able to take a taxi to the airport. He wished he was an adult, independent and free from the annoying control of the grownups.

The great-grandmother's house was a stone's throw away, if only one could get there following a straight line by a helicopter. It was another story biking there – up and down, up and down the hills, sometimes Maxim on the bike, sometimes the bike on Maxim. This road was a favorite route for bikers and the great-grandmother's goat. Maxim used to like it too when he was pulled along sitting on his sledge or when his dad carried him on his shoulders. But in this heat and at such a speed, the road was just a torture.



By the time he climbed up the slope, where his great-grandmother sat in a lush garden in the shade of a pear tree cooling herself with a fan,

he was exhausted, sweaty, and his knee was scratched. He felt like going for a swim rather than to the airport to pick up this girl he has never seen before and with whom he would be able to communicate only in English. Maxim was beginning to regret that he invited Karolin and thus doomed himself to the good manners and foreign language for the whole month.

“Oh, Maxim, look ...,” Great-Grandmother began.

“... what a fantastic splendor of August,” Maxim continued quickly. “Great-Grandma, can you get ready fast? We are going to the airport.”

“What about Sasha?”

“Problems with the tire.”

“Got into an accident again? Couldn’t your classmates take you along?”

Great-Grandmother still carried a grudge on Maxim for his refusal to go with her even though she was the only one of all the relatives who spoke fluent German.

“The menu of my mobile phone got reset, and all phone numbers were deleted.”

“But you are saving everything on the computer.”

“Computer was attacked by a virus the day before yesterday.”

“Poor thing! It is probably coughing.” Great-Grandmother could sound sarcastic but was in fact a good relative, on whose help one could always count. “Wait a moment. I will call a taxi and change quickly.”

Maxim looked at the clock. There was no time left to spare, and Maxim knew from personal experience what a “quick change” means to a woman, especially to such a fashionable one as his great-grandmother who had her clothes made by a trendy designer according to the latest French styles.

“Great-Grandma, you look amazing,” he said as convincingly as he could master.

But it wasn’t convincing enough, because half an hour after the taxi arrived, the two of them, Maxim and the driver of the red Peugeot, were still admiring the great-grandmother’s summer collection of dresses with various combinations of handbags, shoes, and hats.

At last, the taxi driver, a young man who had much more experience in such extreme situations, said, “Madame, the prior dress, the blue one with a white lace trim emphasizes the color of your eyes the best, and it will go well with the last pair of white shoes, plus a silver bag with the big buckle and the hat with the red ribbon, the first one we saw.”

“You’re an angel!” Great-Grandmother clapped her hands like a little girl. “You have a good taste. I would’ve hired you as a personal stylist.”

As she ran upstairs to change, Maxim looked with admiration at the taxi driver. He impressed Maxim even more than the wonder-mathematician he saw with his mom and dad at a resort last year, who multiplied seven-digit numbers in his head.

“How did you do it?” Maxim asked.

“That is nothing. I have many years of marriage experience. This is the only way to get anywhere on time.”

By the time Great-Grandmother, perfectly dressed for the occasion, was sitting in the taxi, there was barely enough time left to get to the airport, and they would be late in case of a traffic.

“You know,” Great-Grandmother began as soon as the taxi started, “when Maxim was still a baby ...”

Maxim mentally poured wax into his ears and shut himself out from the conversation. It was this peculiar nature of the great-grandmother that annoyed him the most and was getting on his nerves. Suddenly, in a circle of respectable people, she would begin to tell how her daughter got lost in the meadow while gathering daisies. She managed to tell the story at a party on the occasion of the signing of a contract between the company, headed by her daughter, Maxim’s grandmother, and a powerful American magnate. Or how her little grand-daughter, Maxim’s mother, forgot a poem at a nursery school concert. This one in the presence of Maxim mother’s potential client with an order for translation of a series of books by a modern English poet that, if signed, would provide for several years for Maxim’s family including the goldfish that Maxim got as a birthday present. It wasn’t the poet who would provide but the money that would’ve been received for the translation.

Maxim closed his eyes and tried to get himself ready and in the mood necessary for the first contact with Karolin because, listening to the stories of adults, he knew how important and even crucial the first impression can be, and he hoped that his great-grandmother's German wouldn't be enough to tell Karolin how Maxim put the right mitten on his left hand and left one on his right, or how he broke a porcelain cup from her favorite tea set that she personally acquired on the Champs Elysees on the occasion of receiving her master's degree at the Sorbonne.

Chapter 5

About the method to increase the “IQ” and the cat with the dog’s name

They arrived at the airport three quarters of an hour later than planned. It was presumed to be Maxim’s fault because he allegedly instructed to drive across the Paton Bridge, although it was Maxim who suggested that they shouldn’t go over this bridge because there were traffic jams there all the time. But adults can never admit their mistakes and always put the blame on children, so Maxim didn’t want to discuss it. He quickly ran to the information desk where he was told that the plane had landed half an hour earlier, the passengers would have passed all the necessary controls by now and were probably at home drinking tea and telling stories about their travels.

Maxim stood beside the information desk ready to cry. At that time, there were few people, and there was no trace of the girl with big green eyes, high raised, as if surprised, eyebrows, with hair the color of fallen maple leaves, and with such a romantic name – Ka-ro-lin. Maxim’s heart was broken. He was standing in place and not running away as far as he could because he was afraid of stepping on the shards of his heart scattered all around.

Great-Grandmother had enough discretion to be silent at that first tragic moment. But in the next moment her discretion was over, and she began to conjure various hypotheses and suggestions, one more ridiculous than the other.

Not far from them stood a wistful boy, a foreigner in appearance. That is, not even in appearance, because he looked like an ordinary boy – jeans, sneakers, T-shirt, jacket, cap. An ordinary boy with a backpack and a violin case in his hand. But there was something in him that made him different among non-foreigners. Great-Grandmother was evidently of the same opinion because she said to Maxim, “He seems to be one of the exchange students. I’ll ask him where our beauty is.” Maxim was sure he hadn’t seen this boy on any of the photos and he wasn’t the right age, but there was no point arguing with Great-Grandmother, just as with any woman.



“Sprechen Sie Deutsch?” Great-Grandmother asked the boy.

“Yes,” he answered in Ukrainian.

“Oh!” she said, a bit confused. “You are a Ukrainian then?”

“To some extent,” the boy answered, and then he said a phrase that convinced Great-Grandmother that this was not a child in front of her but an outstanding personality. He remarked, “Your hat fits perfectly,” and

then he turned to Maxim and pronounced enunciating every word, "Hello! I am Vladislav, I am from Munich and will stay with you."

"Hello, I am your aunt, I came from Kiev and I will stay with you," Maxim replied with a phrase from an old comedy because what was there to say to such an impudence.

The foreign boy named Vladislav looked at the great-grandmother, his eyebrows raised in surprise, and said, "I thought you were the aunt."

Great-Grandmother, who Vladislav placed two generations into the future, was radiant with pleasure and did look a few decades younger. She decided to add another 10 points to his IQ, which placed him ahead of a whole bunch of world geniuses. Great-Grandmother winked conspiratorially at the boy and waved her hand dismissively towards Maxim, as if to say – do not listen to this nonsense, – and between these two, a contact was established immediately and mutual understanding developed.

"How nice of you," she was all smiles. "Welcome, we have a lot of room at home. We just have to wait for a girl. Her name is Karolin and she is coming ..."

"Karolin is not coming. I've come instead of her."

"I don't quite understand," Great-Grandmother began, her voice trailing off.

A madman, Maxim thought, pulling his great-grandmother by the sleeve toward the information window to inquire if Karolin had arrived and if she did, to find out whether that arrogant Milka had taken her home.

"Maxim, wait!" this strange boy called, and Maxim was surprised he knew his name. "Didn't you get her email the day before yesterday? Karolin was attacked by a virus and she couldn't come."

"The same virus attacked Maxim's computer the day before yesterday," Great-Grandmother laughed, though these two facts were by no means related and not funny at all. "Come with us then," she said.

"I am waiting for Jimmy."

"Oh," Great-Grandmother looked pleased, "it means that instead of one boy, we'll get two."

Totally awesome, Maxim thought, two kids instead of the beautiful Karolin. Will be babysitting for a month – wiping noses, reading bedtime stories ...

“Jimmy is not a boy but a cat. I’m not alone, I’m with my cat.”

“Oh, cat!” Great-Grandmother exclaimed. “How nice!” she continued seemingly pleased, although Maxim knew that she didn’t like cats as well as small kids because, in her opinion, they were difficult to train.

While they waited for half an hour longer for a cat with the dog’s name, Maxim got exhaustive information from a lively dialogue between Great-Grandmother and Vladislav about the 7-year old boy and his 18-month-old cat, about the habits and preferences of the two uninvited guests, and Vladislav, in his turn, learned absolutely everything about Maxim and his numerous relatives.

“I’ll be happy to stay with you,” Vladislav said when an airport employee finally brought a box with holes that allowed the cat breathe freely through them. The box was covered with photos of the cat’s namesake, rock star Jimi Hendrix, after whom he was named, we mean the cat after the rock star.

Chapter 6

About the boy from English Park and a grandfather from the House of Peers

“Well,” the taxi driver said, “and where is the girl?”

“There were no girls,” Maxim said bleakly, “just a boy with a cat on top of that.”

They got into the car. Vladislav jumped into the front seat, and Great-Grandmother allowed it with a smile! He put the box with the cat and the violin on his lap and pronounced, “Cool car! Excellent engine!” and immediately won the taxi driver’s heart.

Great-Grandmother obediently took the place in the back seat, but moved to the middle to see the driver and the guest at the same time, pushing Maxim into the corner, and these three started a lively conversation, totally excluding Maxim from their company. He sat silently all the way, which the trio didn’t even notice.

The conversation revolved around the persona of Vladislav.

“Imagine,” Great-Grandmother began excitedly, “there is a boy ...”

“It’s me,” Vladislav explained.

“Really?” the driver chuckled.

“... with a violin,” Great-Grandmother continued.

“By the way, the work of Stradivarius.”

“Wow, really?”

“... and I ask him in German ...”

“And in very good German,” added Vladislav.

“Wow!” the driver whistled.

“... and he answers in Ukrainian ...”

“And in very good Ukrainian.”

“No!” the driver cackled his disbelief.

“... and he tells me, ‘I am waiting for Jimmy ...’”

“This is my cat, a rare breed,” Vladislav was again in the middle with his exhaustive explanations.

“... and he tells me, ‘I live alone ...’”

“Not alone but independently.”

“Ha-ha!” the taxi driver cackled.

“... in the park, poor child ...”

“Not in the park, but in the English Garden, and I’m not poor at all, I have a credit card, platinum.”

“Ho-ho!” the taxi driver guffawed and nearly ran over a group of children crossing the street on the green light.

“... and he says, ‘I’m partly Ukrainian,’” Great-Grandmother went on, not offended at all that this ignoramus interrupts her at every word.

“... or rather, I feel like a Ukrainian,” Vladislav corrected. “I am partly English.”

“Well, well, from a park in England,” cackled the taxi driver, and again nearly ran over two old men who were crossing the street, and again on the green light.

“No, this park is in Munich, and in London is my grandfather. He is a peer.”

“What-what?” the taxi driver asked. “Is he the Mayor of London?”

“No, the Mayor of London is his friend, and he’s a peer, well, from the House of Peers.”

“Ha-ha! A peer from the House of Peers!” Great-Grandmother and the driver giggled.

This trio spoke and laughed at the same time, as in the opera “Le Nozze di Figaro,” with the only difference that this was accompanied by the melody of the blind lirnyks, because Maxim’s mobile played it again and again. All relatives were dying of curiosity and wanted to know about the course of events in the live mode.

Maxim turned the phone off. He sat in the corner of the back seat, forgotten by all, not needed by anyone, and thought how very painful the process of sobering up from the childhood fantasies is. A person of this age already begins to understand that there are no magical things (in the sense of miracles) and that the time of Snow Whites and Ledvediks is over. He begins to search for magic in other things – study, career, accumulation of goods and money, but since he finds nothing but the prose of life, he tries to bring a little sun into his life and falls in love. Or thinks he is in love. And the time of Romeos and Juliets begins. And this time is perhaps the most painful in life.

Maxim looked at the amused trio. They laughed and had fun, like kids in a sandbox. He felt himself to be the most mature one among them.



On the way, they had to stop by the great-grandmother's house, so she could change her dress for dinner. First, Vladislav let out the cat with the dog's name to run in the grass in front of the house. It was a very cute cat: dark gray fur, glittering in the sun, seemed almost blue; the head – round and beautiful; the legs – long with rounded paws. It had a graceful gait, sluggish as in slow motion – a Ballerina from Degas' painting.

“Oh! What a beauty! Just this color of a fur coat I have dreamt of,” Great-Grandmother said, seemingly delighted. She turned to Vladislav, “If you want, you can leave him with me.”

“Thank you,” he said somewhat cautious, “but this cat is very attached to me, in the sense that he cannot live without me: where I am, there he is, like a dog. Right, Jimmy?”

“Squir-r-r-r-t,” the cat answered almost in a human voice.

“What did he say?” Maxim was so surprised that he joined the conversation.

“He was just purring,” Vladislav said and then turned to Jimmy. “Let's go, examine the garden,” and he headed for raspberry bushes, while the cat, without looking at the owner, went in the other direction, toward the house.

Taxi driver, with the great-grandmother's permission, climbed on the tree and tasted wonderful amber-golden paradise apples that Maxim, frankly, was saving for himself.

Great-Grandmother ran back and forth showing new dresses from her summer collection. All three talked loudly, joking and laughing nonstop.

Contents

Chapter 1

About relatives and rules of survival
in the world of adults5

Chapter 2

About childhood fantasies and love at first sight10

Chapter 3

About a slightly broken leg and a slightly
broken mobile15

Chapter 4

About the fantastic splendor of August
and summer collection of dresses21

Chapter 5

About the method to increase the “IQ”
and the cat with the dog’s name.26

Chapter 6

About the boy from English Park and
a grandfather from the House of Peers.30

Chapter 7

About the lost keys and the savior of
a poor duck. 34

Chapter 8

About the family dinner and the haunted villa 39

Chapter 9

About electronic guard and freedom
loving tomcat. 45

Chapter 10

About the swaddled pastry and strange
meowing 51

Chapter 11

About the skeleton in the closet
and the laws of the mafia 55

Chapter 12

About an art retrospective and a voice from
beyond the grave 61

Chapter 13

About a newcomer from the closet and news
from a parallel world. 67

Chapter 14

About three friends and four pigs 73

Chapter 15

About importance of money and possibilities
of anti-gravity.79

Chapter 16

About the upbringing by Pestalozzi and a trouble
with the Voice.86

Chapter 17

About “Beautiful Marquise” and her crew91

Chapter 18

About the course “close-hauled” and the eye of the
hurricane.96

Chapter 19

About paranormal phenomena
and «Flying Dutchman»101

Chapter 20

About posttraumatic reaction of organisms and a
plasmoid critter106

Chapter 21

About the traitor Brutus and the war of parallel worlds . . .112

Chapter 22

About the alien revenge and experiments with
combinatorics.117

Chapter 23

About the Millionaires Club and the Great
fuse revolution 124

Chapter 24

About the unpredictable complications and the
Prince of Denmark 130

Chapter 25

About the glorious doctor Galen and the damage
from the true information 136

Chapter 26

About a stable sparrow and a mild
August hallucination 142

Chapter 27

About the Wars of the Roses and the Society
of Eternal Questions 148

Chapter 28

About the usurpation of power and the
beginnings of philosophy 154

Chapter 29

About elementary particles and alter ego 159

Chapter 30

About the medieval way of life and a flying cat 164

Chapter 31

About the synchronous dream and the fireflies
for a birthday169

Chapter 32

About the music of the cicadas and the danger
of quasi-morphemes175

Chapter 33

About the importance of games and their
usefulness for the universe181

Chapter 34

About the memory album and oversalted
scrambled eggs188

Chapter 35

About the cognition of coincidences
and the ubiquitous chaos195

Chapter 36

About the secrets of time and the mirror universe203

Chapter 37

About teenage crises and the kidnaping
from captivity by philosophy211

Chapter 38

About the theory of the wing and the rule of the lever215

Chapter 39

About matrimonial plans and construction
of the wing223

Chapter 40

About an almost record result and an almost
perfect camera work231

Chapter 41

About the perfect cut of the dress and happiness240

Chapter 42

The last, the shortest and without a happy end246