

Hope for the thief

Author: Laura Yakulka

Copyright 2023 Laura Yakulka

Volodya Lopushka, a tall and thin guy with red hair and a short beard, still didn't understand what he was doing in his boss's car, even though it was the second day of the trip. They had left unexpectedly, taken him straight from his workplace, not allowing him to change clothes or have a snack, and he couldn't even take his phone with him.

At one of his short stops, he managed to ask the guy who was wiping the car's windows for a phone number, but Petro Makukha refused the car wash service before Volodya could pick up the phone. But when, on the next occasion, in line in front of the bathroom at a petrol station, he asked a nice woman standing nearby for a phone number, it turned out that Volodya could not remember any phone number except for one hundred and two.

His boss seemed too angry and unapproachable, and not only on this trip. But that was not what stopped Volodya from begging with tears to be let go or at least told where they were going.

The reason was Natalia, the thin, curly-haired assistant to the emperor, as the employees of the Variety Company called their director, Petya.

She was sitting in the front seat of that very car right now, tired and upset, but no one else in the room noticed. Natalie was very good with herself, the rules of business etiquette, and was fluent in five languages, including her native language. And other wonderful qualities and knowledge that we will not mention here because there were so many of them.

Too thin, but at the same time tall and slender, and the owner of a mop of curly black hair below her shoulders, Natalie could not help but attract attention. But she was out of Volodya's reach, although he never spoke about his feelings and had no plans to do so.

- "I've checked the Ixtrix Tradition documents. We can send them to the financial service for payment," Natalie reported, the first to speak in the morning.
- It's not your job. Tell Denis to take care of it," was the director's short but sharp reply.
- Paryatko is in China. His team starts at ten o'clock. And I had the whole night free for this," Natalie did not give in.
- Don't touch on issues outside your jurisdiction. Everyone has to do their job. It's not your level, understand?
- I remind you of the conditions. The price is only if you paid yesterday or today. Check the details, the price, the quantity..." Natalie said, implying that it was not difficult.
- Sit still or I'll explode! I'm losing my business. What are you worried about?

After the shouting, Peter took a deep breath, smoothed his hair at his temple, took off his watch and hung it on the pink ballerina dangling from the dashboard. He let go of the steering wheel, which was understandable, as the car was no longer moving, and to drive on was to take a risk.

The place they found themselves on that beautiful morning was special, but not everyone who got there could appreciate it.

Old Mukhomory was practically buried in the embrace of the Carpathian Forest. Right here, where they stopped, there was a hill in front of a large wide beam, where the asphalt ended. The view from the hill is mesmerizing, the view expands, revealing a gentle slope dotted with houses and plots, fir trees, maples and oaks.

The road without asphalt meandered, though not dangerous, but still unpredictable. Trails from it were visible both on the downhill side and on the side of the gully where the dense forest began.

- "Aren't you going to go any further?" Natalie asked a minute later, she was in no hurry to leave.

Peter did not answer, but opened all the windows, even though he could not appreciate the beauty, and allowed others to feel the real fragrant life.

- Are we going to walk on our feet? "I want to remind you that you did not give me the opportunity to change my shoes," Natalie said in a steady voice.

- Calm down. There is probably a hotel in such a place or just houses with accommodation for the season. The main thing is to meet my grandmother. I'm not leaving until I find her...

- Here I am, son! "You're lucky, I was just passing by to pick fly agaric," said the one who made all three of them feel cold inside.

She was an elderly woman, wearing a black headscarf embroidered with bright roses. Her face was frightening - wrinkled, of an indeterminate color, with protruding grey eyebrows and a large nose. The warts on her face added zest, so to speak, and the bony hand with long nails on some fingers, which she placed on the car window, thickened the colors even more.

For the first time, Peter was confused, but not because he was frightened, which he really was. He just immediately realized who she was, because his black satin tie of a well-known brand had exactly the same roses as the old lady's handkerchief.

- They were coming towards me. I know. Kyiv? Oh! It's been a long time since I had big guests!

For some time, the response was silence, but Volodymyr was the first to speak up, barely audible, but still saying "Kozly village".

- "How long are you going to keep quiet? He's the only one who told me where it came from, the brave man!" The old woman sniffled unpleasantly.

- Grandmother. You were recommended to me as a good witch and fortune-teller. They say you tell the truth. I'll pay you well for the information. I need to know who...

- A thief?" the old woman interrupted Petro. But in doing so, she made it clear that she knew everything and that her interlocutor should not repeat himself.

- "Well, yes," Petro answered and breathed in, making it clear that the story was over.

She explained that she was waiting for them in her house, where she had more strength and opportunities, but since it would be difficult to walk, she suggested that the accompanying people stay in the car and wait.

- Or which of you will go too?" she shouted loud enough to be heard.

- No!" Natalie replied, she didn't believe it.

- "No, thank you," Volodya said gently, looking at Natalia with hope for future communication.

The road to the old woman's house was quite winding and long. Peter entertained himself by imagining his assistant's stilettos getting stuck between pebbles or sinking into the ground.

Peter tried not to look at the old woman's back, the situation was too unusual. Firstly, he hadn't moved on earth and stones for a long time, and secondly, he realized that the old woman was indeed a witch, because the roses on his tie were exclusive to a French couturier and an Italian contemporary artist.

The house they approached did not strike Peter as anything special and did not scare him at all. It was wooden and old, the roof was slightly bent, the windows were old but not dirty, and they could see something through them, but it was not clear.

When it started to move, Petro got worried, because he thought the old woman was living alone. Besides, if she was a witch, who knows what she could set in motion. Peter's imagination ran wild, and he even stopped at the front door in great confusion.

- Don't be afraid, son. It's nothing new. Everything you're used to. Chughaister has gone to the forest. He won't be gone long, don't worry. Slow stump!

Petro did calm down, perhaps because of her voice or because he was not the timid type, but it should be noted that he did not know who Chuhayster was, and this was the first time he had ever heard the word.

Pushing the door open, the strange old woman entered her house first, followed by the director, wearing a stylish grey suit and black tie with roses.

The room was small, with a table, chairs, a cupboard and that was it. But still, the old woman had another room, dark and windowless, and it was there that those who created the movement in the house ended up.

Petro started stammering as soon as he heard voices from the dark room, it was Natalia and his warehouse worker who were involved in the incident.

- They are... don't be afraid. Our Vasyl rode his bike and brought it back. Let's go," the old woman straightened her headscarf as she said this. Petro looked at the roses again and immediately took a confident step into the closet.

It was dark and light at the same time, a windowless room, but there were candles on the walls, Petro did not understand how they were held up, but some of them were hanging from the ceiling.

In the center of the room was a low table with a large lamp on it that looked like an electric light, but it wasn't. The walls were lined with shelves from ceiling to floor, filled with various objects that Petro easily mistook for wallpaper.

Near the table was a couch or something similar, covered with the fur of an unknown white animal, on which the two he had brought to this wonderful place were sitting.

- Pyotr Maksimovich, sit down. The tea is getting cold. We're already on our second cup," Natalia behaved in a relaxed manner. This made Peter immediately squint both eyes in indignation.

- What's in this tea? "Why are you smiling like a fool?" he added with a little concern.

- "Where did she go?" Petro continued with dissatisfaction, trying to see where the hostess was.

The old woman was on the other side of the table, her face was serious, that was all Petro could see, her body was covered by some kind of haze or just a lack of light.

The games with the light in this room were very strange, it seems there are many more creatures in the room than it seems. The successful business owner began to doubt whether he had done the right thing by coming here with a hundred and thirty thousand, which he could easily afford to lose.

But Peter's problem was that he suspected people with whom he was not just acquainted, one of whom he trusted, another he confided in, and a third he hoped for. He didn't want to believe in their involvement, and the warehouse worker was his hope and solution to this troubling issue.

- Go..." I heard from a dark corner.

- You don't want to know!" the old woman added.

- Would I drive the car just like that?" Petro asked nervously, because he understood what the old woman meant.

He immediately grabbed his cup and, after looking inside for a moment and not even smelling it, drank the entire contents at once. He turned and said to the old woman: "Well?", meaning "speak".

- It's not that simple; you know..." the old woman began.

- "Do you read tarot cards?" Natalie asked. Her curious nose peeked out from behind her curls, which partially covered her face due to her relaxed posture.

- Why would I want to do that? I don't need any hints! What a fool. I'm a bum! My name is Eudocia.

The three of them listened in silence, but as they said nothing, the old woman waved her head like a bird, waved her hand and turned away. There was silence, but not for long, as the old woman stirred:

- What is it? The sea?! Where is it coming from? I can smell it and hear the sound of the sea. Who is a Crimean among you?
- I was born by the sea. But not in Crimea. I was born in Odesa. I lived with my parents there until I was in the second grade," Petro said thoughtfully. But when he felt the same thing with his nose, he didn't realize how he smiled.
- "I smell something, is it the tea?" he asked confused.
- Ha! Perhaps... the little one. I think you'd like to go for a swim..." the boss woman coughed.
- I can't smell it! Why can't I smell it?" Natalia asked everyone, throwing up her hands. She even puffed out her lips and stomped her foot.

Volodya also wanted to say something similar, but he didn't know what to say and kept looking at the other woman until Peter sat down between them.

- Do you know how to swim? You're afraid of water," Yevdokiya hissed at Natalia, not said.
- "I only asked to smell, not to swim," she explained with resentment. After all, her secret had been revealed, and she did not want to admit her weaknesses.
- You didn't just eat your favorite croissants from Brest. So did the sea, don't you get it? What a stupid child, she hasn't grown up.

As she spoke, the old woman became more and more visible, and now you could see the chair with the back on which she had settled down, and even the footrest. She was the one who stirred, apparently not out of fright, before she spoke:

- Let's not tempt fate. Better tell me, Director, who do you think is to blame, if there are any?
- Yes," was the confident answer.

Yevdokiya huffed and waved her head in Volodya's direction, asking as if to confirm: "Him?"

Petro shook his head, not feeling the slightest bit worried that the suspect was sitting to his right and might be worried. But he said something else:

- He is one of them... a warehouse worker. On that shift, he was moving boxes of goods... "I brought a map with video camera footage from the entrance, inside the warehouse, and along the perimeter. There's even a small piece of footage from the dashcam, which shows that there was no one around, just the loaders and Lopushka. Do you have anything to look at?
- Why do I need to?
- Well, it's a big card, a flash memory card. You can't put it in your phone, you know? The old woman closed her eyes and dragged her breath: "Yeah, I see."
- "Who?" some could not resist.
- Them!

The old woman's long, bony arm stretched like a pointer to the right, pointing to the cage with chipmunks.

Petro clearly saw four small rodents in a glass box with a light. They were running and spinning, creating a little chaos. The chipmunks were moving from one wall of the box to the other, with their front legs outstretched, as if they had something inside, but it was empty. He was a little confused,

looking at what he saw, and it even seemed to him that these were the loaders who had brought the goods to the warehouse.

The moment one of the chipmunks lifted its paw and waved it in greeting, the magic was broken. Peter shook his head, and turning away abruptly, began to hastily loosen his tie.

- Wow. Wow. I recognized them, the loaders. And who will I be?" Volodya asked.

Volodya's voice was dreamy, which made Petro turn to him with a surprised face, wondering if he was the only one who was scared.

- You will be...

Before she could finish, Bosorka was carelessly interrupted by Petro, who was unable to cope with the emotions that were overwhelming him:

- That's enough! No need for demonstrations. I don't understand at all. Just tell me who did it. I just want to hear the witch's opinion, that's all, that's why I came here. I'd rather see a show with animals at the circus. This is a serious matter, I beg you. Besides, not only the warehouse staff may be to blame, I have a large company.

Yevdokiya agreed, but still turned her hand to the corner of the room, pointing to a large ant hill under a small light bulb, saying:

- As big as this ant hill. I know. And you're the boss...

- I've had enough!

Peter actually got up, intending to leave. But then Natalie grabbed his arm, which instantly calmed him down, sat down, and even looked into his cup as if he wanted to drink tea.

Yevdokiya scratched her head, thought for a while, leaving the room in a short silence, and suddenly gave out:

- Give me that thing of yours.

Petro did not understand, so she repeated herself, stretching her terrible hand across the table:

- Give me what you brought, what's his name?

Peter still didn't understand, so she added quickly and confidently:

- A map with video camera recordings at the entrance, inside the warehouse, and along the perimeter.

It is unknown what device the boss inserted the USB stick into, no one saw it, but the file was somehow launched. A light source appeared in the dark room, it was directed at the interior door, which was not there, but seemed to be.

The projector starts up, and all three of them soon see a warehouse filled with boxes, and Volodya wiping sweat from his face, but still very cheerful. Volodya kicks one of the boxes, causing the

stack of other boxes above the one he hit to wobble. He laughs, and at the same moment it goes dark.

- "I turned off the lights and left the warehouse," Volodya explained, "the boxes contained coffee beans, and I couldn't break anything when I kicked them.

The old woman giggled, seemingly having a good time, because it went on for a while. Petro just sighed meaningfully, although he wanted to ask his employee once again, "What were you doing there in the dark for three minutes and sixteen seconds?" But he restrained himself, there was no point; for Peter, Volodya was a man from whom he could expect many things, mostly bad things. He had already made the decision to fire him, he shouldn't keep a stupid storekeeper.

When the next image appeared on the screen, Petro was speechless. This video couldn't be on the map, he wasn't going to show it to anyone, and he had gotten rid of it a long time ago.

The video showed Natalia in a blue negligee and black stockings. She was filmed by a man who was not visible, but what he said was heard by everyone: "Do you love me?" and "kiss" in French. What he asks is confirmed with a wave of the head, with a happy smile, and what he asks is done immediately, so that instead of Natalia's face, the audience sees her hair.

- Oh! It's me! With François! We were on holiday in Sicily, this hotel...

- Do you want to confess now what you should have said at the beginning? Why did you hide the fact that you and the Frenchman were lovers? Don't you think I should have known about it? If he's my business rival and you're my closest assistant?

Petro could not control his anger, his tone was harsh, his voice was raised, and his face was red. He started spitting saliva, which made Natalie move away from him.

- He is our competitor, the one who intercepts contracts. Who better to know than you? Speak up!

Peter's voice trembled, which is why he fell silent, his main weakness, the one he had been carefully trying to hide for quite some time, began to show. He fell in love with Natalie after a few months of working together, assuming that she was an honest, responsible, decent girl. He believed her, young and inexperienced, without a university degree, and accepted her into his

office and inner circle. After all, she promised to help him increase sales, make his business successful, and be loyal to him.

All of this happened, and in the four years they worked together, revenues increased four times ten. The business grew because Natalie, without any special education or knowledge, excelled in economic forecasting, knowledge of laws and even accounting. In addition, her perfect command of some foreign languages helped Peter sign more than one successful contract, which opened up many opportunities.

- Ha! What do you think you're doing! I'm Natalie Puree. My mum is Italian, and my dad is French!

- Don't listen to her! She's ours, from Ternopil," the old woman shrugged. "Dad drank, mum disappeared. So their childhood friend adopted them, she was working abroad, so she was Italian, married to a Frenchman, so the surname.

- "That's why François and I..." Volodya said, meaning that they had found a common language. And Peter guessed that the two lovers were old acquaintances.

- "Yes, my neighbour in Belle Isle. We even went to school together," Natalie replied to Petru with a dreamy sigh.

- He's a bastard! He sent his beloved to a competitor. Let's go back, I'll find him! He'll answer for everything!" It was Volodya, not Peter, who said this. That's why it didn't sound convincing, because his voice was squeaky, and he didn't sound determined.

The projector light went out and the room went completely dark, but Petro was not afraid, he was too bitter, and at such moments the sense of security is dull.

One candle was still lit, and Petro saw a pink-framed photograph of two girls and two adults. The older girl is thin and curly-haired, about eight years old, the other is a little smaller and a real chubby with short black bangs from under her bonnet.

Petro heard loud sobbing and guessed who was in the photo: it was the upset Natalia, who even started to sob too loudly, but the old woman intervened:

- Hush, Natalia. Don't cry. It's all right. Do you understand me? They have moved on. You're far away from each other now, but they remember you and love you, do you understand, daughter?

- I know... but I want to be with them," Natalie said, and the candles on the walls began to light up one by one.

Peter even thought that someone was holding the candles, because they swayed a little. For the sake of his peace of mind, he preferred not to think about it.

- François found a younger girl. He said he liked blondes," Natalie said, still sobbing, "she's not blonde, she's red! She was dyed! I know. I had a friend who worked in a salon in Podil, a client of theirs said...

Peter thought, François was married, his wife was a brunette, who was the blonde. His inner question was answered aloud by the barefoot woman.

- There's another one now. He dumped that one, saying he liked black girls, ha ha.

The old woman's eyebrows furrowed slightly, and for the first time her face was distorted with anger, at least for Peter, who tensed in anticipation of something bad. The candles crackled loudly, but the barefoot woman only exclaimed:

- His soul has become completely dark! It's all about money! Money! He loves money! Not her! He wants power, and you, son, are annoying him. He took his beloved to live with him, and he's become very rich.

Peter covered his face, and immediately dropping his hand, he addressed Eudoxia, using somewhat harsh words, but not because he was angry:

- The main thing for me is that Arkasha is not involved. Why do I need to listen to this now? I can handle it. Just tell me who robbed me, was it her and the Frenchman?

Peter looked at Natalia, expressing contempt, but she only smiled at him, which made him feel unbearable again.

The old woman waved her hand in the direction where the three were sitting, and it turned out that a pigeon was sitting above their heads, adjusting its wings, and Petro was surprised that he hadn't heard any rustling or hooting.

- "Is it Natalie?" the poor guy asked hopefully, without hesitation. And without even checking his jacket for droppings, because it was too close.

- "Arkasha, your nephew," the old woman said dryly.

- "You've fallen in love, Petryk," Natalie guessed. She was very happy about this; unlike the person she was talking about.

- "What did you say?" Peter was indignant, tousling his hair ugly, "a board like you? I like other shapes. Besides, like your François, I prefer blondes, okay?"

At this, Natalie turned away, even her smile faded, now looking away, but she still returned to the old woman's words. But just like a real culprit who repeats everything after the object of his fantasies.

- Him! That's who robbed you. You see, he was not afraid of his emperor. Ha-ha, a brave man!

This time, Bosarka didn't need to point out the dark corners, the cage with the parrot came down from somewhere above. The little parrot walked around it, constantly bowing, jumping up and down.

In a shiny little mirror that reflected the glare of the candles, the parrot said clearly: "Vova is handsome!" Right there, next to him, colored balloons were lying in a pile. It became clear that they were filled with air when the parrot jumped on one of them. The balloons began to burst one by one until there was not a single one left.

Peter wanted to hit himself on the forehead, but he just exclaimed in great indignation:

- Filled with air, they all pretended to be heavy. And the parrot, the feathered bastard, I understood everything! Fools don't need to know.

He said the latter directly to Yevdokiya, who, in turn, smiled meaningfully and shook her head in agreement.

It turns out that Petro Makukha was robbed before the goods even got to the warehouse, and he was puzzled by the fact that what happened was impossible. No one left or entered after unloading and before the goods disappeared, and the cameras did not give anyone a chance to slip through. The boxes were empty, so they burst open like those balls in a cage, that's the answer.

Having got what he wanted, Peter started to leave, alone, and without waiting for his employees, he didn't care what would happen to them, he was too annoyed and angry. He didn't care about the heels, the tight skirt or the timid nature of those he had come with, he just walked towards the exit, these two had become too unpleasant.

The old woman watched Peter with one eye squinting as he clapped his hands on his sides, looked into his inner jacket pocket and now looked at her in confusion. The fact that he didn't have any money on him didn't faze the barefoot woman, but she gave an unpleasant snort before speaking in a sharp tone:

- You can't love a piece of iron more than a person. Here, you could drive through a gully, but you make them walk through the forest and the gully and across the lawn...

The last words of his grandmother's speech were so long in Petro's head that he heard the end of them while standing next to his black metal beauty on wheels. Surprisingly, two of his passengers were already sitting there, one of them yawning and the other opening a laptop.

- It's not like that, grandma. You can see what he is like, dear. It's not a long walk, I didn't even notice," Peter said as he opened the door and took out his bag.

Evdokia just gave me a sly glance and sniffed again, apparently, she had her own opinion, which is not surprising, you can take everything lightly when you don't need anything.

Holding his wallet in his hands, Petro began to think about how to thank the barefoot woman, he had a lot of money, but for some reason he was sure that she needed it.

- You thought right. But I'm going to charge you, you understand me, son.

- Yes, yes, I understand. Any work should be paid for.

- "You are good, so I will be good," said the old woman, not listening to what Peter was saying, interrupting him.

- There is a wonderful place here where you won't feel sorry for your iron doll. There's a race there... a go-kart race, or something?

- A rally?" was Petya's surprise. Not only had he never heard of such a venue, but he had no idea how it was possible.

- I mean. You mean there's a racing track here?" he clarified, confused.

- Yeah. That's what I'm saying, son, take me for a breeze. That will be your payment.

Peter thought about it. Doesn't the witch have enough experiences like this? She must be able to fly a broomstick, from what he had seen in her house. In addition to the thief, Peter discovered Natalia, secretive and cunning, who seemed like a different person to the old woman in the house, her level of composure and control was impressive.

And now Natalie leaned over the driver's seat and spoke to Peter in a completely different voice, as if the other person had been with him at the bossa nova reception before:

- Peter, if you don't mind, I'm going to go to the shop while you guys' ride. Even though we're only here for a short time, we have all day to get back. You even refused to have lunch yesterday. And now it's almost ten o'clock. I'll find something edible enough for you to eat.

He didn't want to agree with this woman on anything, so he ignored the question, opened the back door and invited Yevdokiya to sit on the seat.

- Oh, no! I need to sit in the front seat. How are we going to drive if I can't see anything?

Petro thought about it, but agreed, walked over to the front passenger seat and abruptly opened the door, with a rough "get out" to Natalia.

She obediently went out, she was not in the habit of disobeying her boss or being naughty, the only thing she did was take a step to the side because she was about to go to the store.

- "Go," was the simultaneous response of Peter and the bossa nova.

Yevdokiya got into the car quite nimbly, which immediately drove off on its own. Peter tried to steer in great anxiety but noticed the turned look and the smile of yellowed teeth. The barefoot woman put a finger to her lips and seemed to wink, but it was not certain, Peter was not sure of anything now...

- Fasten your seat belts," the old lady in the sports cap asked politely. But the person who said this was too shocked by what was happening to care about the details.

The road looked gorgeous, just like on European motorways, but the further they drove, the sharper and more unexpectedly the car turned. They found themselves in the Carpathian Forest, and it was full of bizarre surprises - up and down, right turn, down again, sharp left turn. Petro didn't hear any grinding, although it was supposed to be, and he didn't see much, although he wasn't shy, just waiting for them to stop. It's scary to describe what was happening in the back seat; Vovochka didn't bother to fasten his seatbelt, and now he was practically hanging from the side handle.

The asphalt here was excellent, and it even seemed strange to the humble Petro that he had never heard of the Carpathian Races before, everything was so well arranged. The only thing was that the road was too windy, they turned so sharply that some of them got dizzy.

The old woman was the only one who felt confident - she screamed, shouted, jumped up and down and almost clapped her hands. This was surprising, as it turns out that this old woman has a side to her, the passengers would have thought, but they were too scared and nauseated.

On one of the bends, the car jumped sharply as if on stones, but everything went well, they did not overturn and did not fall out of the windows, although this was possible if the windows were open.

- Sorry, son, I didn't notice the pebble. It's not a big one. I didn't damage the wheels," the old lady said before shouting "Go!!!" and a joyful "Hey!".

The car left the forest as quickly as it had entered it. Soon they were at the door of the shop, and Natalie was just approaching it.

The barefoot woman, quite confidently, opened the door for the surprised Natalia, and said, grunting slightly from the effort:

- I need to do some shopping too. You guys keep going. There's a cafe there. It's about seventeen kilometers beyond our Mukhomory. My client's granddaughter works there. Croissants and coffee. Make your assistant happy, she deserves it.

- Thank you, Ms Yevdokiya. French croissants are not my thing. My late sister loved them. I don't, not anymore..." Natalie said politely after taking her seat and hastily kicked off her shoes.

- Go! And you have a daughter, everything will be fine. The husband and children, he will thaw out, I understand. "He'll thaw out by the evening!" was Yevdokiya's reply, followed by a loud slamming of the door.

As soon as the car drove on, Petro turned the steering wheel several times, he was driving himself. He was pleased, and the fact that he was leaving these places, meeting the unknown, was too delicate for his nerves. He wasn't the shy type, but his heart was still pounding loudly.

Only after five minutes of slow driving with the windows open did Petro start to think, he had some questions, but not to Volodya, he was clear.

- Can you answer one question? Last week in Rome, you jumped into the pool from the tower, right? Do you know how to swim?

- "What? I know, what's the question, do you need to get a seashell from the bottom of the sea?" Natalie replied with a smile, "sorry for the sarcasm, I'm very tired. It's good that you and this woman worked things out so quickly.

- Quickly?

- Twenty-two minutes is fast for me. Besides, it was near the car, so we didn't waste time on the way home. I thank her for her efficiency.

Natalie looked at the driver as she said this, and he responded in kind, until she pointed confusedly towards the windscreen.

The girl blushed, her embarrassment was understandable, but it took a minute to understand why Petro's face turned pink:

- You're Natalie's sister, right? The little girl with the bangs. I've seen you. A pretty little girl with no curls, what's your name?

Natalie turned away in great embarrassment, her director was right. The younger sister of the person he had spoken to at the house was sitting in the front seat with him, and he was taken aback.

Marta really wanted to cause trouble for her older sister's abuser, because it was the kind of trouble that Natalie could not bear. The girl gave up on a promising future and focused on François, taking on her sister's personality.

After Peter calmed down, his thoughts went in a different direction, coughing and even smiling, he suddenly turned towards the back seat:

- Burdock, can you answer me? While we're looking for something to eat. What's the coverage in our warehouse, huh?

Volodya was so frightened that even his jaw shook. But he remained silent until he was asked:

- Linoleum or something heavier?

- Why do you need it? Everything is arranged there, just like in other warehouses.

- We'll come and see..." Petro thought aloud as his subordinate began to tremble with fear.

As soon as the car with the three of them got on the road, oncoming cars started winking at them. Petro thought he hadn't thanked the boss enough, because he hadn't.

After thanksgiving, Petro's car lost its shine because it was completely covered in mud, even the rear side windows were damaged. In some places, small Christmas tree branches were

sticking out or hanging from the body, and a larger branch stuck to the back, which gave Petro's gorgeous Jaguar a long tail.

But even when Peter sees this, he will not stop smiling. This is the power of love in the pure of heart.