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Blooming Flower

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Blooming Flower

Revekka Shiryayeva

Girls are not flowers
Well, maybe they are



No color, no joy, no liveliness
They just exist
Like a body without a soul



My fate was born with me
Actually, it was chosen

Chosen by my dad.
Yes, my *dad*.

You are my little girl
 You're 'just' a girl
You are beautiful
 You should've been a guy
You are smart
 You're gonna be a stay-at-home mom

Stay-at-home mom.
My fate.

The dream of being daddy's little princess doesn't exist in the European world. Little girls don't grow up hearing their dads tell them how much they love them. Instead, little girls grow up hearing their daddies warn their mothers to "make sure you teach her how to cook," and "make sure she's not a disappointment to the family."

Disappointment.



Summer 2014

When you are raised in a Russian family, you don't complain. You abide to the authority figure. *Dad.* Life is not much different from other families. You go on family vacations. You have dinner together. You gather on family holidays. Life seems great, and a lot of the time, it is.

However, problems don't start existing until you begin to question your father's fate for your life. That's when it becomes hell.

Rule Number One: If you want a happy life, you never question your father

Rule Number Two: You never talk back

Rule Number Three: Your job is to stay home and take care of the family

Those rules echoed in my mind and glued my tongue to the surface of my mouth to prevent me from talking back. For fifteen years of my life, I was able to keep myself innocent in front of my father until my mind could do it no longer. After having the chain pulled hundreds of times, it finally broke free. I wasn't going to let him choose this time.

I'd had enough.

Throughout my fifteen years, I thought a lot about my future life. Actually, I couldn't think, so I would dream. I dreamed about going to college, having my own job, and most important, marrying the man of my dreams. Not my father's dream man, but mine.

I would rather be single than marry a man like my father.

My father acted like a prince in the household. *Ruthless prince*. When he came home, he was the center of attention. You must bow to his rules or war broke out in the house. If he had a bad day, you were his boxing bag. His words were bullets, striking you in all directions: “дрянь, дурная, тупая.”¹ Some days I wonder how I'm still alive. Jesus must really love me.

After being tattooed with ferocious words, I would lie in bed every night and have the serene clouds lift my airless mind and body into space, and have the gentle wind rock me back and forth to sleep. A closed-lip smile would appear on my angel-like face, and warmth would radiate down my body. Jesus would treat me to a glimpse of heaven until a

¹ trash, retarded, stupid

wave of electricity from my father's hand would run down every nerve in my body and send me back to reality.

Reality of being no one.

The Poem

There's one thing that I never talked to my father about.
Marriage.

In the Russian culture, if you're not married (or at least dating) by the age of nineteen, then you're considered old. They usually refer to you as "остатки," or leftovers. To not be a disappointment to the family, fathers push their daughters towards marriage. In other words, they make you get married to a guy that they favor.

My worst nightmare.

My father didn't start mentioning marriage until his eye caught the attention of what he thought would be my future husband. Because I looked more pale than paper, my dad would always tell me, "пацанам нравятся темные девчонки."² That was intended to be a hint that I should go after the first guy that came my way. *Asshole*.

Even though I was only fifteen, the idea of dating hovered over me every day because I knew, sooner or later, I would have to face it. Face to face.

Little did I know, there was one thing kept hidden from me for several months. My dad had already picked out a guy for me, and apparently he was so smitten by me.

Bullcrap.

He must have been dreaming.

I saw him a couple of times in church before he gave me a card with a handwritten poem and told me to text him later that night.

² Guys prefer darker skinned girls

Shiryayeva: Blooming Flower

*Me without you is
Like a bird with a broken wing,
Losing its value in life,
Like a bee without a stinger,
Hopelessly trying to survive.*

*Me without you is
Like summer without a sun,
Cold and lifeless,
Like winter without snow,
Un-natural and awkward.*

*Me without you is
Like the night sky without stars
Empty and cold,
Like an abandoned house,
Scary and falling apart.*

The whole time I was reading the poem, all I could think about was how horrible his handwriting was. My little five-year-old cousin could write better than that. My stomach was tight as a rock, and my hands trembled as I held his monkey-faced card. My brain refused to continue reading, as if it was sending me a warning sign. I never finished reading the whole poem. I skipped to the end.

“I will gladly spend my foreseeable future with you. You are very special to me. So please, in a couple of years when we are older, maybe we could...”

Hell no!

As I stood in front of my bedroom mirror, I threw the card on the ground and stomped on it, as if it would disappear. I leaned half my body against my mirror and buried my head in my hands because my body couldn't hold it up any longer.

The whole day, I walked around and told myself I was not going to marry him, as if that would help. I was angry because I knew it was a set-up by my dad.

Those words were a lie.

That poem was fake.

I didn't text him the whole day. As a matter of fact, I couldn't even bear to pick up the phone. He disgusted me. I could feel his six-foot body standing in front of me, sneering at me with his snakelike hazel-brown eyes and dark black hair, which was cut super short, smiling at me, revealing an inch of his top gums. His poem was an attempt to catch me on a hook like a fish and keep me isolated from the world.

Little did he know that my chain had already been broken.

The Conversation

“Revekka, Mikhail’s father called me today and told me that you refused to date his son.”

With a slight hesitation, I looked into my father’s eyes and stated with confidence, “Yes, I did.”

For a second, my dad couldn’t fully grasp what I’d just said. I could see his hands tighten, and his eyebrows became wrinkled. His jaw clenched so tight that all his neck muscles were prevalent. He took a step forward and with his tone raised stated, “What did you just say?”

“I told you I’m not gonna date him.”

I tried to defend myself by talking back. Big mistake. HUGE.

“I don’t think you have a choice. He’s your best option. He comes from a good family, and he seems like a hard worker.”

“Well, I do have a choice.” Wrong answer. “I’m not ready to start dating, let alone get married. I gotta finish college and get my nursing degree.”

Oh no! I just broke every single rule. Crap.

“College? I didn’t raise you to go to college. I raised you to be a good mother and housewife. Besides, a good mother is supposed to stay home and raise her kids.”

You never raised me. How do you know what a good mother is? You can’t even properly fulfill your fatherly roles. My blood boiled, and every muscle in my body flexed. I wanted to tell him what a horrible role model he was in my life, and how miserable he made my life. Instead, I calmly looked him in the eyes and said, “I can be more than just a housewife.” Wrong answer.

Oh crap! The bomb went off.

I think it must have been at least a couple of hours of him yelling and blaming my mom for not raising me properly.

Didn’t he just say he raised me? *Hypocrite.*

I listened to it all without saying a single word. I think my silence angered him even more. I listened to all his harsh words and prophecies about my future. How miserable and unsuccessful my life would be, and of course, he didn’t forget to mention the fact that God would punish me for not upholding the Fifth Commandment. I wanted to be a good Christian and warn him that God would also punish him for his profane words. I decided not to add wood to the fire.

After he was done rambling, I took a step forward, looked him in the eyes, and exclaimed, “I don’t care what you say. I am going to college.”

The shackles finally broke.
I became free.