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Rasa Bugavičute-Pēce

THE BOY WHO SAW IN THE DARK

a coming-of-age story based on actual events

Characters:

Jacob (the Boy Who Saw in the Dark)

Zelma (Jacobs' mom)

Zemguss (Jacobs' father)

and peripheral characters that can be played by supporting actors

Place and time:

memories of Jacob, starting from the age of 6 in the early 1990s, up to nowadays, when he is 30 years old

Important note:

Jacobs' lines written in cursive are his inner monologue, which leads to various memory flashes and situations to be played out

Proposition:

staging the play so that it can be appropriate for blind audiences as well

Liepāja
2019

Set in the kitchen of Jacob's parents. Everything looks as usual. The kitchen is small and compact. The wallpaper is still decorated with butterflies. The linoleum is replaced with laminate. The clock on the fridge says "семнадцать часов" (5 p.m.). Radio "Latvia" is playing. Zelma is cutting veggies and throwing them in a bowl. She's making a potato salad. Jacob takes the cut-up produce and drops it in his mouth. He's drinking tea.

Zelma. I saw you in a dream.

Jacob. Really?

Zelma. Yes, a nightmare.

Jacob. What was it?

Zelma. You called me on the phone and told me you were coming because you passed your driver's test and wanted to take me to see the rhododendrons, and I told you to stop messing around – rhododendrons... But you told me it's very beautiful there and I have to see them, that you really, really want me to go look at those rhododendrons, and I repeated that it's not worth it – it's not even rhododendron season! Too early! But you just kept going – just like in real life, and while we were talking on the phone, someone rang the doorbell, so I said I have to go get the door. I said it to you over the phone, and you told me to go get it – how long are you supposed to wait – and I'm walking over to get the door, and the phone cord stretches out endlessly after me as if holding me back! But I'm thinking – I'm talking on a cell phone, and then it turns out that I'm not, and I can't let go of it because I'm talking to you, and then I'm unlocking the door, already opening it, and I'm thinking – I'll be seeing you in just a moment, and then... I wake up.

Jacob. I see.

Zelma. Yes. Can you imagine? Rhododendrons. I must've heard about them on the radio or something, and now they came up... Rhododendrons. From where? I don't understand.

Jacob. Yes, strange.

Zelma. Yes, and I guess it was you calling and visiting at the same time. At least that's what I understood.

Jacob. And here I am, yeah...

Zelma. Like from both sides at once.

Jacob. I haven't been dreaming lately.

Zelma. Oh, I didn't dream when I was young either! Slept like a log.

Jacob. And I've also been thinking that I'm getting older.

Zelma. Would you stop it! Old...

Jacob. Well, not old, but older.

Zelma. Nobody gets younger. You wish!

Jacob. I do...

Zelma. Valery is already 93!

Jacob. Who's that?

Zelma. Lyosha's granddad.

Jacob. Should've said so...

Zelma. Don't you remember...

Jacob. Never heard anyone call him Valery before.

Zelma. Well, now you'll know.

Jacob. Yup.

Zelma. So... And Lyosha had his third kid.

Jacob. Right. Is he still in Ireland?

Zelma. Yes, somewhere around those parts, only comes to visit in the summers. But it's all good, he pays for Valery's rent, as far as I know.

Jacob. Oh...

Zelma. Yes... So, what's new at your place?

Jacob. Not much... The kids are growing up – every day, a new story from the kindergarten. Once they start talking before sleep, you can't get them to stop. I know everything there is to know about the teacher now.

Zelma. That's good! It's good that they tell you things... You used to tell us every single thing...

Jacob. Yup.

Zelma. I guess they'll insulate the house after all.

Jacob. Really?

Zelma. Yes, won over the old-timers.

Jacob. Unbelievable.

Zelma. Yes, I'll have to get the dark curtains up as well so they don't look inside the kitchen. I have them in the other rooms, just not here... They say the scaffolding will be right against the windows! I don't want them to look inside at my breakfast.

Jacob. Wouldn't you prefer a roll?

Zelma. What's a roll?

Jacob. I mean the roll-up blinds – you install them on a window, they don't take up space, don't collect that much dust, won't soak up food smells, why would you need curtains in a kitchen...

Zelma. Yes, you can do that too, I suppose. I already talked to Daina, she told me to maybe get something else, she was telling me about some bamboo thing.

Jacob. You can see through those up close.

Zelma. Oh, then they're no good for me.

Jacob. I'll buy the blinds.

Zelma. Oh, stop it...

Jacob. It's the least I can do, otherwise I'm behind Lyosha...

Zelma. You need to rest.

Jacob. I'll have time for that.

Zelma. But then you have to measure the window, right?

Jacob. Yeah, probably.

Zelma. When dad wakes up, ask him where the tape is, I don't go through his things.

Jacob. It's probably where it's always been...

Zelma. Who knows...

Jacob. Smells good.

Zelma. Yes, just a little while longer, and it'll be ready... Will you have some?

Jacob. Do you even have to ask? Of course!

Zelma. But the rolls, do they come in a pattern?

Jacob. They have different kinds...

Zelma. Then you'll pick something to match the wallpaper.

Jacob. Of course.

Zelma. I think plain ones wouldn't do.

Jacob. Okay.

Zelma. I'll give you the money.

Jacob. Mom...

Zelma. No, I have some saved up! I always save some...

Jacob. Mom, I'll buy the roll and put it up – don't you worry about that.

Zelma. But dad and I can...

Jacob. Mom.

Zelma. Alright.

Jacob. Mom...

*The oven timer goes off – the cake is ready.
Zelma opens the oven and checks the cake with her fingertips.*

Zelma. It's done. I have to go wake dad... *(Starts walking towards the room.)*

Jacob. Wait! *(Stands up, stops his mom.)* I'll go. *(Leaves the kitchen.)*

Jacob. *I get up and go, and I don't understand why it's so hard to tell the person closest to you what you really wish to say. It's easier to stay silent, get up and go wake up dad. Just like when I was a kid.*

Some people believe the majority of our memories aren't experienced and lived, but made up, fabricated by our imagination from all the things once told to us. I don't know if I believe that. Sometimes it seems I remember a lot more than I should. It's like I was trying to memorize everything not only for myself, but for someone else as well. Memories give people the opportunity to gain experience and create their personality. That's what it says on Wikipedia. Could be. I don't know. Hearing – my parents calling me. Eyesight – the red stripe on the staircase wall. Touch – my mom's cheeks. Taste – coffee. Smell – wet concrete...

*

Jacob. *It all began at the hostel. I don't know how many of you have any hostel experience, but no – what I'm talking about are those late 80s / early 90s communal housing projects where young families lived. Hostels, where apartments were granted to young professionals. Those that had a single room and a toilet/kitchen end, and the showers were in the basement, shared by the entire building. Ever since those basement shower times, I've had a special relationship with the smell of wet concrete and slimy wet wooden grates on a tile floor. Wooden grates are supposedly less slippery, but you could always knock your toes against them... It's actually interesting – the only thing I remember from the hostel showers is the way downstairs to them, but never climbing the stairs back to the third floor. I assume I was snuggled in a towel and, half asleep from the warm shower steam, pressing my nose against my mom's or dad's neck... One of my first childhood memories is about riding a balance bike – I had this small black motorcycle, and I would ride it around Cesis, along Valdemara Street, speeding down towards Piebalgas Street. It was a great feeling, it felt like I was really flying when...*

Zelma. Jacob! Jacob, my Tigger? I can't hear Jacob!

Zemgus. Jacob?

Zelma. That bike was a completely insane idea!

Zemgus. Stop yelling!

Zelma. But there's a street there! Jacob!

Zemgus. Jacob?!

Zelma. Jacob, for the love of God, stop!!!

Jacob. *I hit the brakes at the last moment – my parents can't see. It was there, by the hostel. We still lived there back then. I really liked it at the hostel, I somehow perceived the entire three-story building as my own. I was the boss – I ran the fastest, jumped the farthest, I was the most needed, and I was the only one who could see. I was special...*

Auntie Daina is doing the dishes.

Daina. *(Winces.)* Aw! *(Looks for her eye, but can't find it.)* Jacob! Jacob! Hello!

Jacob. Yes, Auntie Daina?

Daina. Jacob, dear, would you find my eye for me? It rolled away somewhere...

Jacob. *Auntie Daina was born blind, but then her eyeballs got infected and started to rot away, so they had to take them out.*

Jacob is looking for the eye. He finds the glass ball and starts to study it.

Jacob. *Auntie Daina has glass eyes that fall out occasionally. Most often, when she's doing the dishes. What did she scrub so hard that her eyes would pop out? I could never understand back then and I was convinced that old people just disintegrate...*

Daina. Did you find it?

Jacob. Yeah, it was under the sink.

Daina. Pop it right in!

Jacob rubs the eye against his pants. "Fp!" – the eye is back in.

Daina. All good?

Jacob. *(Doubtful.)* ...Well... yeah...

Daina. What would we do without you? I'll tell your mom that you're the best... *(Kisses the back of his head.)*

Jacob. *Auntie Daina was my favorite aunt in the entire hostel. And there were many people... Three stories filled with darkness... At the entrance of our building, between lilac bushes, there was a bench on which someone would always sit, no matter the season. And a bit farther, next to the hostel, there were clotheslines, always with bedsheets and nightgowns drying on them...*

Jacob is running around like a Ninja Turtle.

Old Walter. Little Logins, is that you?

Jacob. I'm a Ninja Turtle! Raphael.

Jacob. *Old Walter lives on the second floor. He drove his car drunk, crashed it, and lost his eyesight and everything else he had...*

Jacob. *(Ninja sounds.)* I'm a Ninja Turtle... Raphael.

Old Walter. Hey, turtle boy, just don't ever smoke, alright? Don't smoke – it's poison... Later on, your lungs will need it like air! I can't – I literally hate that I have to sit here smoking, but my lungs demand it. Just don't ever smoke, alright?

Jacob. Ninja Turtles don't smoke.

Old Walter. That's good, that's right...

Auntie Daina is calling Jacob from the window.

Daina. Jacob, my boy, are you outside? *(Pause.)* Jacob?

Jacob. Yes, Auntie Daina, I'm here!

Daina. Sweetie, could you run to the store and buy me some shortbread cookies? You're such a fast runner, you'll be done as fast as a little meteorite...

Jacob. Yes, in just a minute...

Old Walter. We're the non-smoking turtles...

Daina. And if they don't have the ones with the stripes, any others will do, just no jelly on top...

Dad is calling Jacob from the window.

Zemgus. Are you outside, boy?

Jacob. *My dad was born visually impaired, but he pretty rapidly completely lost his eyesight in his teens...*

Jacob. I have to run down to the store – Auntie Daina needs me to.

Zemgus. First run upstairs and take a look – is the mouthpiece from my trumpet somewhere around here? I can't find it!

Jacob. Yup...

Zelma. *(To Zemgus.)* Are you talking to Jacob?

Zemgus. Yes, he's outside...

Zelma. *(At the window.)* Tigger, come over when you can!

Jacob. *My mom is beautiful... She was already born blind.*

Jacob. Okay, mom!

Old Walter. Hey, boy, since you're already running to the store, could you bring me a handful of raisins?

Zemgus. And when you're back from the store, we have to finally solder the radio...

Jacob. *I was the eyes of the hostel, and I did many things as a kid that some people might find odd.*

Old Walter. And get the raisins, alright? I'll eat raisins and smoke less!

Zemgus. Hold on, boy! I'll go to the store with you.

Jacob. *And so we go...*

Jacob is walking his dad down the street.

Jacob. *I don't remember how I was informed of the fact that my parents couldn't see. It's not anything special. It's just the way it is. It's always been that way. It's not even important. What's important is...*

Zemgus. What's the difference between a coffin and a double bass?

Jacob. What?!

Zemgus. Do you know the difference between a coffin and a double bass?

Jacob. No.

Zemgus. A coffin has a dead body inside. *(Laughs.)*

Dad hits his head on a street sign pole.

Zemgus. Oh, darn it!

Jacob. *(Frozen in fear.)* I'm sorry.

Zemgus. It's okay, it's okay.

Jacob. Show me! Take your hands away.

Zemgus. No, it's alright.

Jacob. You're bleeding.

Zemgus. Am I? That happens...

Jacob. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't see...

Zemgus. It's no big deal, nobody dies from a little bump on the head.

Jacob. It's not a bump, you're bleeding.

Zemgus. Is it a lot or something? *(Tries to feel it.)*

Jacob. Don't touch it with dirty hands...

Zemgus. Now you're talking like your mom.

Jacob. Come closer, I'll clean it. *(He's looking for a handkerchief, but can't find one, so he rolls up his sleeve to wipe the bruise with it.)*

Zemgus. *(Bends down, so that his son can wipe his bruise.)* I'm asking, is there a lot of sauce?

Jacob. *(Cleaning his dad's forehead.)* What sauce...

Zemgus. Blood – is there a lot of blood?

Jacob. Well... a fair bit.

Zemgus. Alright, if you say so. It's not like an axe to the leg! Let's not tell your mom about this.

Jacob. But what if you have a concussion...

Zemgus. I don't.

Jacob. Are you sure?

Zemgus. Come on. I've walked off three of those, don't start panicking now.

Jacob. *My dad is big and strong. I even saw him fight once! I don't remember, it was some sort of party or sports event... And who was it with...*

Zemgus. Ludans, is that you?

Jacob. *That's right! With Ludans. He's a former friend of my dad's who once stole one of his tunes and started playing it as his own at dances, making money, and wasting it all on slot machines.*

Zemgus. Is that you?!

Ludans. Yeah!

Jacob. *And my dad punched him. It was a whole thing, and I was truly proud of my dad that time, but mom was furious.*

Jacob looks at mom – she’s getting dressed. She’s touching each item to put an outfit together.

Jacob. *My mom is a fancy lady, she wears dresses and skirts almost exclusively – that’s how ladies dress, and that’s how I like it. She is neat... Tidy. Attentive.*

*Jacob keeps watching his mom from a little distance.
Suddenly he hiccups and draws attention to himself.*

Zelma. Jacob, are you there?

Jacob. Uh-huh.

Zelma. Stop creeping around! You shouldn’t do that. *(About the hiccups.)* Go drink some water – you know...

Jacob. I didn’t want to bother you.

Zelma. It’s good that you didn’t want to bother me, but you can’t creep around like that!

Jacob. Sorry.

Zelma. Sorry... Are you sneaking up on others and... peeping?

Jacob. No.

Zelma. You have to learn to give people privacy. Especially around here! You can’t just... go around being quiet. Do you understand?

Jacob. Uh-huh.

Zelma. And I’m serious. Good boys don’t do that.

Jacob. Okay.

Zelma. Come show me how you look... *(She finds Jacob and touches his clothes to ‘see’ what he’s wearing, fixes his hair. About the hiccups.)* Lift your arms and hold your breath. *(About the shirt.)* Is this clean?

Jacob. *(Looks at the shirt carelessly.)* Yup.

Zelma. *(She tucks Jacob’s shirt in his pants, strokes his hair, and unintentionally sniffs him.)* That’s good.

Jacob. Mom?

Zelma. Yes?

Jacob. I want to tell you something.

Zelma. Go ahead and say it then!

Jacob. You’re beautiful...

Jacob. Mom has a really wide smile.

Zelma. You don't say!

Jacob. She strokes her clothes.

Zelma. I'm glad to hear that.

Jacob. My mom can't hide her emotions. If she's happy, I can see it. And I'm happy for her...

Zelma. Let's go, we still have to decorate Daina's cake!

Jacob. I still don't get who exactly cares about cake decorating around here. Nobody can see! But it's Auntie Daina's birthday and I do what I have to because I'm the boy who sees in the dark.

*Darkness. It's Auntie Daina's birthday.
Everybody is chattering amongst themselves. Party noise all around.*

Zelma. Jacob, pass the meatballs! (Pause.) Have you finished your potatoes?

Zemgus. Who needs more juice?

Daina. If anyone needs anything, speak up!

Ivars. Is everyone's glass full?

Zemgus. Why are you asking like I don't know what I have to do?

Ivars. Just checking.

Zemgus. How does the poem go – *[starting a short birthday poem]*...

Ivars. Woah, you got the years wrong!

Zelma. It's only thirty-five...

Zemgus. I know, I know! Why are you asking like I don't know...

[reciting a birthday poem]

Cheers! (Drinks.)

Zelma. Zemgus, come on...

Ivars. Bottoms up!

Zemgus. "Zemgus, come on" what – we have to cheer! What kind of a birthday would it be with no cheer.

Ivars. (Starting singing.) Happy birthday...

Daina. You already did that.

Zelma. *[starts another - lyrical birthday poem]*

Ivars. Listen up! Listen up! Zelma is reciting a poem.

Zemgus. And you go and interrupt her.

Ivars. Zelma, go on!

Daina. Sorry.

The room quiets down.

Zelma. *[reciting birthday poem]*

Daina. Oh, honey...

Ivars. *(Loudly.)* That's some proper poetry for my woman! Ay, Logins, you can shove your rhymes up your ass in comparison to Zelma! *(Laughs.)*

*The audioclock says "двадцать три часа". (11 p.m.).
Jacob looks outside the window, party noise continues.*

Jacob. *It's Auntie Daina's birthday, so the small hostel room is full of people – this is a three story building after all. The only other kid here is Lyosha, but he's a lot younger than I am, and he can't see well, so he doesn't count. I'm the only one here who can see. The window of this tiny room is open – outside, an unusually warm summer night. And I see a bat fluttering along the opposite house. And I see a woman changing through a third floor window of that same house. And I see a worn-out pinkish nightgown slip over her back. And I see her leaning closer to the mirror and running her index finger over the wrinkle across the middle of her forehead, as if trying to smooth it out, and I take it upon myself to greet the dawn with my eyes open...*

Ivars. Hey, guys, turn on the lights, damn it! Little Logins can see!

The light is turned on. It makes Jacob wince. He's the only one.

Jacob. *And then there was light, for me. (He sees his mom's puckered lips.) My mom presses her lips together. It's not good. I had to take care of that myself – turn on the lights, instead of sitting in the dark and waiting for others to do it... I have to get my mom to stop pursing her lips in annoyance and to draw them into a smile when someone speaks about me. Ever since she was a child, she knew she would have a family and a child: a son, Jacob, me – for whom she'd be the best mom in the world. My task is not to disrupt her big plan, but now her lips are pressed together and she's annoyed – it's not good.*

Daina. Jacob is a golden boy, I've never seen such a silent child – not a peep! Like a little fly on the wall...

Jacob. *Daina is saving the day. She sometimes reminds me of Lassie – she's also loyal and always shows up at the right time to make everything better. I look at my mom – her lips relax a tiny bit.*

Ivars. It's remarkable, though, heck, that you've managed to raise him so docile!

Jacob. *I'm looking at Ivars. He is Daina's beloved man-friend who drinks like a fish – that's what my mom says. He was blinded by diabetes.*

Ivars. My brother's son is a total shitstorm, he comes over and runs up the walls, for Pete's sake. I told my brother, what's the point of seeing things if you can't handle your boy, so we got into it hard, and they left. At least no one bothers me. But you, you're a great mom, Zelma, I respect that.

Jacob. *My mom's lips start forming something that resembles a smile.*

Ivars. You too, Logins, respect, man. Who would've thought you could be such a decent old man! Zelma figured it out when she saw potential in you once. *(Laughs.)* But without that, you wouldn't have gotten this little fella.

Jacob. *And my mom is smiling – that's my highest praise.*

Ivars. Hey, Daina! I'd like one of those for myself too. Like a walking pair of eyes. *(Laughs.)* Little eyes running around.

Zelma. Alright now – how long do we have to talk about the same thing...

Jacob. *My mom doesn't like Ivars at all. And Daina can't even have kids.*

Daina. Who wants coffee?

Jacob. I'll count!

Zemgus. I need my daily fix of caffeine!

Jacob. *The taste of coffee is the true taste of my childhood. My mom obviously won't let me drink coffee here, so I have to do it my way...*

Jacob. Raise your hands so I can count!

Zemgus. Me!

Jacob. *I know everyone else here will raise their hands in silence because someone will see them – I will.*

Jacob. *(Counting.)* One, two, three, four, five...

Jacob. *Twelve people out of the fourteen adults have raised their hands...*

Jacob. Thirteen!

Daina. While the water is boiling, you cut the cake... and tell us, how did you decorate it?

Jacob. The outer circle is halved slices of kiwi, then the inner circle is compote strawberries, then a ring of tangerine slices, and another circle of strawberries, and, in the middle, a kiwi rose... And powdered sugar sprinkled all over – evenly, no piles.

Daina. Beautiful, so very beautiful!

Jacob. *In reality, I've laid out a prominent 'R' shape on the cake – for Raphael the Ninja Turtle, but nobody here has to know...*

Auntie Daina has poured the coffees and I bring them around until I get to mine – the coveted. The taste of coffee is the taste of freedom – the taste of grown-ups-can-but-kids-cannot, which I'm free to enjoy as I please on days when I nag my mom until she lets me skip kindergarten. On those days, I pour coffee for myself and drink it like a big man, looking out the window as far as I can see, and listening to fairy tales on tape...

I find my place at the table and set my cup of coffee in the only free spot on the table.

Zemgus. Hey, youth, pass the sugar! I need to sweeten my life!

Dad is looking for the sugar bowl, but knocks over the cup. He freezes.

Jacob. *And I see the fancy cup shake on the even fancier saucer and, as if in slow motion, the coffee cup tips over, and the good stuff is pouring right onto me. Hot! So damn hot!*

Jacob bites his lower lip and stays silents.

Jacob. *But dad is silent and so am I – as long as we stay silent, nothing has happened.*

Daina. Zemgus, perhaps you'd like to sing a song?

Zemgus. You don't have to ask me twice, birthday girl!

Zemgus starts singing, the silence is broken. Jacob tries to suck coffee out of his sweater.

Jacob. *Next morning, I wake up in my pull-out chair all wet and sweaty, with a large red burn mark on my chest. I'm dizzy, and my shirt rubs against the burnt area nastily, so I grab a piece of white paper from the table and press it on the burn mark – it feels pleasantly cool.*

Mom comes inside the room.

Zelma. *(Silently.)* Jacob, my Tigger, you have to get up...

Jacob. I'm up.

Zelma. Finally.

Jacob. Good morning.

Jacob. *My mom walks up to me and hugs me...*

Zelma walks up to Jacob, finds and hugs him.

Jacob. You'll squeeze me to death!

Jacob. *I say this because I feel the paper sticking to the burnt skin, tighter and tighter.*

Zelma. Never drink, Jacob. Alright?

Jacob. Okay.

Zelma. It's not worth it.

Jacob. *I don't understand why my mom says that, but I feel myself becoming real and visible, and full of all sorts of foreign weaknesses. I was six! But I listen to my mom and I still don't drink, even at thirty.*

Zelma. Let's go! We have to go help Daina clean up after the party.

Jacob. *My mom gets up and starts walking, and I follow her. Dad must still be sleeping – right, I guess he was the reason for the drinking talk.*

At Auntie Daina's, we're eating leftover cake, drinking coffee, and they are talking in Russian.

Daina. Прекрати, он никакой не пьяница...

Jacob. *Drunk!*

Daina. ...посмотри на Ивара. Его я скорее всего увижу трезвым через несколько дней.

Zelma. Это меня не успокаивает. Вчера он еще час распевал песни...

Jacob. *Songs!*

Zelma. ...у окна как придурок.

Jacob. *Pridurok!*

Daina. И что такого? Иногда им надо расслабиться.

Zelma. Не заступайся! И что соседи подумали?

Daina. Что отмечали что-то - это и подумали.

Zelma. Это не помогает. Мне противно...

Jacob. *Something disgusting.*

Zelma. ...смотреть, когда он превращается в такого болвана.

Jacob. *But this time I feel better than other times like these, because I have my own secret – the white piece of paper pressed against my red stomach.*

*

Jacob. *Before I start going to school, we move from the hostel to a one-bedroom apartment. Maintaining order during the move was a whole deal. Each thing from the cabinets had to be put in the exact same spot it was before at the hostel, and my mom ended up doing all of it because my dad and I were doing more harm than good. So I took advantage of the situation and spent most of the move lying on the floor of my room or squatting in the corner of the balcony. We have our own balcony now.*

I know that my grandmother visited us on September 1st, but I don't remember her at all. I remember my mom and the blue suit that was itchy as hell...

Zelma. Come here, Tigger! You have to get dressed!

Jacob. *And I also remember how excited my mom was.*

Zelma. Look at that, I tightened the buttons so they stay in place – how do you like it?

Jacob. I'll look like a news anchor...

Zelma. Do you like it?

Jacob. *(Considering mom's expectations.)* The jacket's itchy.

Zelma. Jacket.

Jacob. It's itchy.

Zelma. That's because it's good and warm – proper wool... Is it buttoned all the way?

Jacob. All the way.

Zelma. Auntie Maiga will be glad...

Jacob. *Auntie Maiga can't see anything at all – in order to tell the time, she needs the radio on 24/7 – it started after she went to the store in the middle of the night once because she got the time of day confused. She went blind because of meningitis. She gave me her son's hand-me-downs.*

Zelma. Look, I also found a ribbon. Do the colors match?

Jacob. Yes!

Zelma is tying the ribbon.

Jacob. The books that Auntie Maiga gives me usually have messed up front pages.

Zelma. Jacob... People give you things and that's your gratitude? You have to say thank you, not complain. Show me... *(Looks at Jacob.)* Beautiful, oh... Beautiful! My boy... *(Hugs Jacob)* You'll see – you are going to love school. You'll have lots of friends. You'll learn so many new things... Oh, how I liked school! Really – it's the best time. You'll love it.

Jacob. *Another thing I remember from September 1st was the three gladioli that were hard to carry in the wind, and my grandmother said that they cost a whole fortune. And still, I don't remember her.*

Girl. Who wants to play catch?

Jacob. *So we're standing there all dressed up in front of the teacher, and she goes on and on and on, something about us being a big new family now. To some extent, I was really hoping for that – to meet "my people" at school, as it had happened for my mom, since she was suddenly like everyone else at the boarding school! Everybody was blind! But me, I met the "others" at school and realized for the first time that my real family was not all that normal. At school, I was visible. I was visible, my parents were visible, their difference was visible, my stupid little woolen suit was visible. So I tried to at least be inaudible and I chose not to speak. Not to anyone and not for a long time.*

Teacher. Thank you!

Zelma. Tigger, you can't stay quiet all the time. If the teacher asks you something, you have to answer. *(Pause.)* Jacob... Imagine if I hadn't spoken to anyone at school, I would never have met Daina! Just try to talk to people, just for today, so that the teacher doesn't feel weird and she doesn't tell me we have to send you to the school for special kids...

Jacob. But I am special!

Zelma. That's not what I mean. Just talk to someone today. Okay?

Jacob. Okay. But it's not fair.

Zelma. Life isn't fair.

Jacob. *"Life isn't fair" is an argument after which I stop trying because my mom can't see – whatever I tell her, she'll always win the life-isn't-fair game.*
I remember this conversation very clearly, because, after it, my mom handed me my daily sandwich and we walked into the staircase, and I noticed the most wonderful creature in the world – small, gray, furry...

Jacob. Wolf!

Zelma. What are you talking about, Jacob?

Jacob. A kitten, mom, a kitten!

Zelma. Get out of here...

Jacob. I'm telling you! There's a kitten on our mat!

Zelma. Shoo!

Jacob. Mom!

Zelma. He's going to piss all over everything, it's going to stink...

Jacob. He looks like a wolf...

Zelma. Even more so...

Jacob. *My mom is dragging me away, but I manage to throw the sausage from my sandwich to Wolf and he grabs it with his teeth like a predator.*

Jacob. Mom, he's eating the sausage from my sandwich!

Zelma. I cut that for you, not for him.

Jacob. *Afterwards we're walking and I'm telling my mom that I'm an Indian – Wolf's Chief. I will send him a telepathic message that I'll return! But my mom chooses to stay silent because she can – it's only me who has to talk to everyone, so that's what I do at school.*

Jacob. I got a cat! His name is Wolf! I have a cat, his name is Wolf. My cat is called Wolf. Wolf is my cat – he's my best friend. Ah-oooooh!

Jacob. *The teacher calls me out for talking too much, but I tell her about my cat as well, and, finally, she calls us in the evening and praises my mom for resolving the situation so successfully by getting a cat.*

Jacob. Mom, tell me about your Tigger!

Jacob. *Tigger was my mom's childhood cat. Her best friend and only confidant from the times before boarding school – when she lived in the far countryside. There were all sorts of animals back then, but Tigger belonged to my mom alone. As a kid, mom would play with Tigger when everyone else left for work, and she'd wait for Tigger at the end of the road on the big boulder to touch and smell him, to know what puddles the cat had been prowling through, and which heap of hay he'd been sleeping in. Tigger was very dear to her, and that's why her pet name for me is also Tigger. When mom talks about Tigger, you can hear the warmth.*

Jacob. Mom, come on, tell me about Tigger!

Zelma. Tigger was, and Tigger is no more.

Jacob. Mom, can I go check on Wolf? What if he was dragged away by giant crows, I've heard that can happen. But maybe he's waiting for me at the top of the stairs, huh? I'll only look! What do you say?

Jacob. *My mom is silent.*

Jacob. Mom, I'll go take out the trash, okay?

Zelma. Dad did it in the morning.

Jacob. Do we have anything on the clothesline?

Zelma. No.

Jacob. Mom, do you need anything from the store?

Zelma. Jacob, you're killing me!

Jacob. *That's a lie – I have never tried to kill her. I stop bothering mom.*

Jacob. I love you, mom.

Jacob. *I go over to my dad.*

Jacob. Dad, if grandma had allowed it, would you have had a kitty when you were a kid?

Zemgus. I did!

Jacob. What?!

Zemgus. Well yeah, we had Kitty and then another Kitty, and then later on, a Max...

Jacob. You had several cats as a kid?

Zemgus. Yes. And a dog in between – Tobias. He was light gray, pretty... But crazy too – his barking would shake the entire neighborhood! He'd only let your grandma approach him – two peas in a pod, you see... So I guess I'm more of a cat person.

Jacob. Dad, I want a kitten! Can you talk to mom? I found one in the staircase this morning... Wolf...

Zemgus. *(Stays silent for a bit, takes a deep breath, and goes to 'battle'.)* Wait here. Zelma!

Jacob. *My dad is going over to my mom and I know it's going to be a total failure because he's not the best mom-convincer. So I sneak out into the staircase and notice Wolf on our mat, patiently waiting. I take the kitten into my hands and press my face against his warm belly.*

Zemgus. Jacob!

Jacob. I'm here, dad.

Zemgus. And the cat?

Jacob. Also here.

Zemgus. Gimme.

Jacob. *And I put the small gray thing carefully in my dad's huge palms. Wolf is so small that he gets lots in my dad's hands like in two bathtubs, and I get scared that I'll never see him again, but then, my dad turns around and enters the apartment with Wolf. Seriously?!*

Zelma. First of all, you and only you will take care of him, Jacob.

Jacob. Okay!

Zelma. And you'll bring the animal to the vet first thing tomorrow to check if he's alright. That will be your birthday gift.

Jacob. Alright.

Zelma. Lastly, I want everything to remain where it is.

Pause. Jacob hugs his parents, squeezing the cat in between. Mom and dad smile.

Jacob. *Wolf is my best friend! We chase each other and when he makes turns on the linoleum, his paws slip in a funny way. We've practiced, and if I show him my hand, he jumps on it from the ground – like that! – up to my arm and then grabs it with all four paws, and then I hold him in my lap and put him on my shoulders, and he bounces off my back with his sharp claws and gets back down, and hides behind the couch, and then I have to reach him, and he just goes on scratching, and I even kind of like it, because scratches on the arms are evidence that I. Have. A cat.*

Each morning, I get up early to get lots of playtime with Wolf and then tear up newspapers for his litter box. Wolf usually spreads them all over the apartment, so the first thing I always do when I come home from school is clean the pieces of newspaper from around the perimeter, clean up the pee between my parents' shoes, cut him a couple of slices of sausage, eat the bread myself, straighten the couch cover that's usually all messed up, and tell him about school.

Jacob. You know, I don't even know if I like school. I feel like a cat among people there, you know what I mean? If only I could take you with me sometime...! Then you'd understand. There's Zigurds, he has this fat pencil case, three sections. One section has felt tip pens, another has pencils, and the third has pens, his eraser, and a ruler. It's one of those with floating fish and one wavy edge... And Nora – her backpack has this front pouch with a changing picture, when you look at it this way and that... And Einars has jeans.

Zelma. Did you say something, Jacob? *(Pause.)* Jacob!

Jacob. I'm talking to Wolf!

Zelma. Jacob!!!

Jacob. *I run to my mom because her voice tells me something is wrong. I get there and see a wet lump in my parents' bed.*

Zelma. What is that?!

Jacob. I don't know.

Zelma. It's a cat's hairball!

Jacob. What?!

Jacob. Instead of worrying about the one thing I should worry about, I...

Jacob. Is Wolf okay?

Jacob. Mom blew up because I hadn't been careful enough, and I was told that it's something cats do – first they eat and then throw up their own hair. Fantastic creatures. I still think so.

Zelma. Ow!

Jacob. Wolf has grazed my mom's calves, attacking from the corner of the room.

Zelma. (About the tights.) Are there holes?

Jacob. (Looks.) Ummm... yeah. A little! Just a little bit.

Zelma. Give me the cat right now!

Jacob. Mom, don't.

Zelma. I said – right now!

Jacob. I take Wolf and hand him to my mom, she takes him away, literally throws him into the bathroom, and closes the door.

Zelma. That'll give him time to think.

Jacob. "What a jerk," I think to myself and shrink – this is the first time I ever think about my mom using words some of my classmates say, and I immediately feel bad about it. I angrily grab my backpack and go do my homework in the bathroom where Wolf is locked up – a Chief never leaves his people behind.

In my family portrait for school, I only draw myself and Wolf with Indian headdresses on our heads – we're in the woods and both our faces are really angry. I put an enormous amount of time and energy into the drawing, and I show it to the teacher instead of all my homework. The teacher takes my diary and writes something in a very chaotic handwriting, but then seems to change her mind and asks, when would be a good time to call us at home.

I get home, and it turns out that mom hasn't been at work. What the hell?!

Zelma. Jacob, what happened to the curtains?

Jacob. What about the curtains?

Zelma. You tell me!

Jacob. Well...

Zelma. Jacob, I can't take it anymore – that cat of yours is running up the curtains!

Jacob. That's the first time I saw my mom crying. In complete silence.

Jacob. Mom, come on...

Zelma. Stop it! Stop trying to talk me into things! The cat will drive me mad! He's running up the curtains, just look at this – the wallpaper is all torn up by the door. What does it look like here?! New apartment and such a mess already! Like a lair!

Wolf is scraping the linoleum.

Zelma. Do you hear that?

Jacob. I'll clean it up right away!

Zelma. Did he at least get some on the litter?

Jacob. Yes.

Zelma. And again, there will be torn up paper everywhere. He dragged the pancakes all over the table this morning, do you understand?! The entire table and windowsill is covered in oil, he's chewing the flowers – I simply don't understand, who does such things?!

Jacob. Mom, come on...

Zelma. No, don't even start! All of my pantyhose are torn, and you can't even pet the beast – he digs his claws into your hands! That cat is a nightmare! I live in a nightmare! Take him to the bathroom.

Jacob. But, mom.

Zelma. Don't you talk back! You promised me you'd handle him! And what's happening now? What is happening?!

Jacob. Mom, I am handling him...

Zelma. No, you're not! I don't even know you anymore.

Jacob. *My mom purses her lips and runs over to Daina's, slamming the door behind her.*

I mop the entire house and can't stop thinking about how my mom doesn't know me anymore.

I'm not her Tigger anymore. I have to be her Tigger.

Jacob. Wolf? Wolf? Come, we have a mission.

Jacob. *I empty my backpack, line it with a plastic bag, put my dirty sweater on top and swaddle Wolf inside. I go along the train tracks far away – I'm taking Wolf to the woods. When I let Wolf out of the backpack, he roams around the moss all confused, but he doesn't run away. I make a nest for him from my sweater and throw a pile of sausage next to it – Wolf attacks the food, and I turn around and run quickly away, away, away, away, away...*

Zelma. Maybe he sneaked out into the staircase...

Zemgus. Maybe the balcony...?

Jacob. Yeah... Well, it's fine.

Zemgus. You could put up posters...

Zelma. We'll ask all the neighbors...

Jacob. *In the evening, when I lie in my cold bed, my mom comes in and smells me – I am her Tigger once again...*

Only now do I clearly realize – that's when it all began, and it had nothing to do with a cat...

*

Doorbell jingles.

Sales lady. How may I help you?

Jacob. *Gerkens & Co. I still remember the smell.*

Zelma. Yes, Jacob needs an outdoor jacket. A new one!

Seller. Let's take a look... *(To Jacob.)* What color would you like?

Zelma. The jacket must have good fabric, the color is not important.

Seller. Understood, I'll fetch a couple of options that might fit *(To Jacob.)* Jacob?

Jacob nods in agreement.

Seller. Jacob's size. Let's find something really trendy.

Jacob. *The sales lady smiles at me. We had to buy a new outdoor jacket because I'm being sent to Salacgriva alone, while Daina moves an hour away from us and my parents help her pack. We had to buy a jacket to leave the best impression of me, my parents, and my grandma and grandfather on all of Salacgriva. So, the jacket has to be...*

Zelma. Good, sturdy, waterproof, clean, perfect. So, do you see anything that might do?

Jacob. *(Whispering annoyedly .)* Hold on.

Jacob. *The sales lady brings all the jackets into the fitting room and invites me in.*

Jacob. *(To mom)* I'm going to try them on.

Zelma. Yes, alright. I'll just... take a look around...

Jacob. *The first jacket I choose to try on is moss green with red stripes. I like it a lot! The fabric is stiff and sort of smells like gasoline. The jacket has deep pockets and a pull string along the*

bottom. The zipper is not just a plain zipper but thick and wide, with a solid fake leather pull cord at the end – I pull the zipper up and down several times with gusto. Zr-zzzzzzz, Zr-zzzzzzz. I want to show the jacket to my mom, but when I turn around, I notice she's pretending to look at something on other hangers, even though it's girls' dresses. It annoys me when my mom wants to pretend to someone that she can see, when it's clear to everyone that she can't.

When I started going to school, I noticed that there are different ways others pay us attention. Some people stare at my parents without confusion but pull a compassionate face when they see me. Those people get on my nerves the most. Others look at my parents as if secretly, fearing that their interest might be noticed, but when they look at me, they suddenly have a welcoming smile, and they often ask me something, too. I don't usually feel like trusting them. Then there's those who are willing to run to the other side of the street when they see me with my parents. I want to chase them barking or yelling, to scare them even more. The sales lady is in the category of people who pretend that everything is business as usual – nothing special. I guess I like those people the best, but they most often turn out to be from another category.

But that zipper, though, that's pure pleasure – that's what it seemed like at the time. Zr-zzzzzzz, Zr-zzzzzzz.

Zelma. Is it large enough?

Jacob. Yes.

Zelma. Try on the others.

Jacob. The sleeves are too short. Looks like thin fabric, it'll probably soak. The hood doesn't fit, it's small or something... No, the sleeve bands are too tight. No, don't like it, don't like it, no.

Zelma. Alright! So the first one was the best?

Jacob. Yes.

Zelma. Show me.

Jacob. *I hand her the jacket. After a careful inspection that the sales lady covertly watches from the other side of the shop, my mom pays for the jacket. The sales lady is smiling and carefully places my new, precious item into a fresh, rustling bag, but when we're leaving, she doesn't smile anymore, and instead, thinking I don't see her, crosses herself.*

Jacob. *(Scaring the sales lady.)* Boo! That's what I would have wanted to do, but I didn't.

Doorbell jingles. Jacob and his mom leave the shop.

Jacob. Mom? It's real windy, right? Can I put on the jacket?

Zelma. *(Smiles)* Nonsense..... *(Pause.)* Happy?

Jacob. Uh-huh...

Jacob. *I squeeze my mom's hand harder.*

Jacob. Thank you!

Jacob. *And then I yank my hand away from my mom's like it's burnt – my classmates are walking on the other side of the street. I pretend to very slowly tie my shoe and take my mom's hand only when they're a safe distance away.*

Jacob. My shoelace got loose!

Zelma. Oh, right...

Jacob. *Shame...*

When we get home, my new jacket is taken out of the bag and carefully placed on a hanger – my mom will pack it at the very top of the bag, so that when my grandma helps me unpack my things, she'd see the jacket first. I think that maybe when I'm on the bus to Salacgriva, I could already take out the jacket and put it on – the impression I might make on my grandma when I step off the bus wearing a new jacket, might be, to my mind, more striking. In a good way...

Zemgus. Jacob!

Jacob. Yeah!

Jacob. *My dad is calling me into the kitchen. Each time we go to Salacgriva or the far countryside, my mom prepares carefully. She bakes a currant crumble cake and makes a meatloaf. The kitchen air is thick and full of smells, my dad is sitting in his spot and drinking coffee. The radio is telling the weather for next week – it's going to rain! Next to my dad's coffee mug that I follow with a hungry look, I see a coin of fifty santims.*

Zemgus. Here!

Jacob. *(Doubtful.)* Coffee?

Zemgus. *(Laughs.)* No, the money! That's for you to spend in Salacgriva. So you can live large.

Zelma. Put it in your wallet and don't spend it all at once...

Zemgus. Splurge it on anything you like! You can even blow it all on sugar water like Emils from that movie! How did it go? "When I don't have money, I can't..."

Jacob tightly embraces his father, stopping him in the middle of the sentence, then runs to hug his mom.

Zemgus. ...drink, but when I do have money, I'm not allowed to." But you – hey! To hell with them, you can drink as much sugar water...

Zelma. Enough with this nonsense...

Zemgus. What nonsense? Cultural facts!

Jacob. *I'm not listening anymore – I run to my room and mercilessly shake out the stickers from my wallet, leaving only the money – fifty santims. A fresh jelly pastry costs only six at the bakery! I grab my metal ruler!*

A turn and a ruler swing to one side: I am the Highlander, Duncan MacLeod!

A turn, a jump mid-air and a ruler swing to the other side: I'll buy myself pastries in Salacgrīva every day and treat my friends – oh, the good life!

A running start, a twist jump and a swing towards the ground, stabbing the linoleum with the ruler: my grandma will be happy because I'll have the jacket and money, and friends, and my grandfather will forever forbid her from feeding me porridge with butter for breakfast!

Jump, jump, right turn, a swing to one side, followed by a left turn, a swing to the other side, a flying kick and an upswing – swoosh... A massive hole stretches over my new jacket.

I'm so freaking upset! Covered in sweat, I paste a zipper into the hole with super glue, turning the hole into a pocket. MacGyver could not have done it better! My mom bought it when I told her she hadn't noticed the pocket at the store, and grandma didn't give a rat's ass about my new jacket.

After being sent off to Salacgrīva for the summer, my favorite part was always returning home.

Jacob has returned from Salacgrīva, but dad doesn't let him see mom.

Jacob. What's the matter?

Zemgus. We'll wait for your mom to calm down, and then you can go to her.

Jacob. But...

Zemgus. No buts this time.

Jacob. What happened?

Zemgus. Auntie Daina is gone, it's been hard on your mom...

Jacob. *While my dad still wants to say something, I've already gone to my mom – her eyes are all puffy from crying. I'm also really sad now. I snuggle up next to my mom and lie close to her. My mom is good.*

Jacob. I have a new friend.

Zelma. Huh...

Jacob. His name is Matias.

Zemgus. What kind of a name is that.

Jacob. Yes. Matias. He is also 9, and we built a fort from old planks in an apple tree in his garden in Salacgriva. We spent the entire week building it, and it turned out good. He said he'd continue building when he can, so that next time I visit, the fort would have two stories. And we also agreed to write to each other in code so that nobody else could read our letters, but I'll tell you what's in them, mom, and...

Jacob. *And so I talked and talked, and talked, and my mom slowly got back to steady breathing.*

Due to her emotions, when school started again, mom decided she had to walk me to school every day... (Pause lasts till it's clear that a blind person is walking a sighted person.) And the goodbyes! As if I was planning to stay in school forever after classes. And so Matias started writing to me. For example, that nobody walks him to school, otherwise everyone would make fun of him. Or that Matias has very good grades, so I have to stay alone in my room at night so I can keep up... Or that Matias' parents gave him a bike for good grades.

One morning I hear my mom retelling my stories to Daina on the phone, mentioning that we'll be going to Salacgriva soon for grandma's big birthday, and that we'll also invite Matias over to make Jacob happy. Wait a minute.

Jacob. Mom, are we going to Salacgriva?

Zelma. Yes.

Jacob. But it's not summer!

Zelma. It's not... You'll go on your own in the summer! But everyone has to go to grandma's birthday. For a couple of days.

Jacob. But I can't!

Zelma. What do you mean you can't?

Jacob. *Because then I'd have to tell everyone who Matias really is. Matias is a transformer toy that I bought in Salacgriva for 44 santims. It's not safe in Salacgriva right now, it's a black swamp.*

I'm sitting at school, angry and groggy, until Lauris comes up to me – he's quiet and calm, so you never really notice him, but when you look at class pictures, he's always in all of them, and he's always standing somewhere near me.

Lauris. What is it?

Jacob. Nothing...

Lauris. Trouble?

Jacob. *Lauris is like Lyosha's granddad when he's about to tell a dirty joke – he's literally bursting with glee, his cheeks shine in the sun like they're waxed, and I think his right eye is twitching ever so lightly. Kind of awkward. But what if he has some advice for me?*

Jacob. Just promise you won't tell anyone.

Lauris. I swear! I swear to God, cross my heart and hope to die!

Jacob. *I don't know why, but I believe Lauris is someone who'd help you bury dead bodies – my dad always says that's what good friends would do.*

Jacob. I need to make sure I don't have to go to Salacgriva, you know?

Lauris. Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Jacob. *Lauris' parents are military, and Lauris mostly wears camo pants with countless pockets that look filled to the brim.*

Lauris. So... I think there's only one option. You have to eat a Lego brick.

Jacob. What?!

Lauris. Yeah, you can eat Legos, but folks always freak out when you tell them you've swallowed one, they think the brick can slash your insides, and you'll die of internal bleeding, but the reality is that it just doesn't happen with Legos. The brick comes out on its own later...

Jacob. I mean... Are you serious?

Lauris. Totally. I've passed several.

The bell rings.

Jacob. *I'm sitting in class and thinking that Lauris would suggest burning the bodies or feeding them to wild animals, but never just simply burying them, when I get a note. Me! A note! I unfold it and can't understand what I'm looking at. Two dead bodies (because they have X's for eyes) in some sort of bubble. No signature, but Lauris is winking at me from the opposite row of desks. Because I don't want to look like a moron, I nod at him like I get it, but I still don't get the drawing in the note. A moment later, the teacher quickly grabs the drawing from my hands*

After school, I go home with no hope for the future.

Zelma. Jacob, did Matias send you that drawing?

Jacob. What?

Zelma. The drawing of two blind people in a pit, was that from Matias?

Jacob. What pit?

Zelma. Jacob, you answer when I ask you something!

Jacob. *When my mom yells, she doesn't hear, and since she then neither sees nor hears, it's double crazy.*

Zelma. Your teacher called and told me everything...Are the people with the X's for eyes in the drawing me and your dad? What else does this Matias write to you, and why do you need a secret language for each other? What are you not telling me? Are you scared of anyone reading your letters? What else are you hiding? First, you refuse to walk to school with me because you're ashamed – I know! Then you avoid talking to me, and now... what am I supposed to think?! Jacob, you're killing me! You tell me right now, why you had such a drawing in your hands? Did Matias send it to you? Do you think it's normal that he draws things like that? Are you even considering what your teacher thinks of us now? That you're some sort of terrorist! You cannot make fun of your parents like that. Oh, I'll show you...

Jacob. *I simply don't know how to respond, so I don't say anything, but that just makes it worse, and eventually I get a lashing and a ban on writing letters to Matias. The situation resolved itself in a very ugly way. And it turned out that Lauris did the drawing to help me get out of going to Salacgriva – it was an invitation to go swimming. Two people diving in a lake.*

*

Zemgus. Jacob, come here, I'll take a picture of you!

Jacob. I don't want to...

Zemgus. It's not about what you want, but what you need. Come to the balcony, there are pretty flowers! Are you smiling?

Jacob. Yup.

Zemgus. Watch the birdie!

Jacob. *When I was little and the "birdie" was about to appear, I'd turn my back to the camera – I was scared that a crow would fly out of the camera and peck out my eyes.*

Zemgus. There should be a shot left! Will you take a picture of your mom and me?

Jacob. Watch the birdie.

Jacob takes a picture of mom and dad.

Zemgus. The darkroom is no problem for me! I don't even need the red lamp! *(Laughs.)*

Jacob. *My dad develops photos himself. My grandfather taught him that – what's well taught cannot be forgotten! Also, he wants me to have childhood mementos... From my teen years, I only have a couple of class photos, at some point my dad dropped the whole thing...*

Zelma. *(Mom hears a car approaching. M.)* Jacob, they're here!

Zemgus. Hey, maybe I should take a picture of you boys together?

Jacob. No, no, don't.

Jacob. *I'm going swimming with Lauris and his parents. They have a brick-colored Ford. .*

Jacob climbs inside the car. He has a bag with him.

Jacob. Hello!

Jacob. *I say hello to Lauris' parents.*

Jacob. Hey!

Jacob. *I say to Lauris.*

Lauris. Hey. Ready?

Jacob. Yup.

Lauris. What's that?

Jacob. Cookies. Want some?

Lauris. Sure.

Jacob. *Lauris' mom clears her throat...*

Lauris. Yes, please...

Jacob. There you go. *(Gives Lauris cookies.)*

Lauris. *(Whispering.)* We'll drink Fanta by the lake...

Jacob. *My jaw literally dropped from joy, but Lauris returned to my bag.*

Lauris. What else you got?

Jacob. Take a look. *(Jacob takes out swimming goggles.)*

Lauris. Wow... Are they new?!

Jacob. Yeah, I've only tried them out in the bathtub.

Lauris. Did you see, mom – Jacob has new goggles! I want a pair too...

Jacob. *Auntie Daina gave me the brand new goggles when she moved in with her boyfriend. No idea where she got them...*

Lauris. Put ‘em on!

Jacob puts on the goggles.

Lauris. Ah! So good!

Jacob. *And we spend the entire day by the lake, swimming until our lips turn blue – and that’s long.*

Both boys dive in.

Jacob. *I also went berry picking with Lauris and his parents, and I ate a buttload of berries in the woods because Lauris’ mom allowed it. And we usually drink cocoa at their place, and Lauris’ dad lets us watch Van Damme movies. And every once in a while, I catch myself thinking how I wish to switch lives with Lauris for a day – just for one day...*

Lauris. Let’s go to your place!

Jacob. What?

Lauris. Let’s hang out at your place! I could skip my music lesson and hang out at your place!

Jacob. But...

Lauris. Come on! Be a good friend.

Jacob. *And I am.*

Jacob. But only until my parents come home.

Lauris. Okay.

Jacob. *I open the door and let Lauris into the apartment – my first guest ever. I’m really scared.*

Lauris goes inside. He looks around surprised.

Lauris. Where do you keep things?

Jacob. What do you mean – things?

Jacob. *In our house, the cabinets aren’t filled with tons of souvenir bells, countless framed pictures, loads of books, notebooks, file folders, colorful cassettes, toys and stuff, nine tea sets in various colors, glasses of different shapes and sizes, no messy pile of slippers in the corridor. We don’t have random medals on the walls and no dusty dolphin figurines or glass swans on the shelves. We don’t have clothes piled onto a chair and a stack of newspapers in the toilet. We*

don't have Christmas cards of the past years lined up on the windowsills. We don't have a video cassette shelf or a player, but we do have...

Lauris. *(About a tape recorder.)* Wow, what's that?

Jacob. A tape recorder!

Lauris. What?

Jacob turns on the recorder and puts on a tape of him babbling as a baby.

Jacob. *My father used to record my babbling when I was a baby. As a memento.*

Lauris. Is that you?

Jacob. Yup.

Lauris. Sweet! Can we record something too?

Jacob. Sure.

Lauris. Sweet...

Jacob. *And I'm proud that we can record The Prodigy's "Firestarter" over a fragment of tape – it's currently the most popular song at high school dances. According to Lauris. I have no idea how he knows that, and I don't care. Feels good. Our place is good.*

They record Prodigy "Firestarter" from the radio and sing along.

*

Jacob. *I've only cried from pain once. When I had appendicitis at the age of 11. First, I tried to convince myself that nothing hurt, but eventually I called my parents for help. Then they called an ambulance, and I was taken to the hospital for surgery. Four days later, they could discharge me, but the problem was – my parents had to pick me up!*

I knew I had to ask them to call my parents, or else they wouldn't come, but... I was ashamed. And so I waited for the right moment and said I was going to the bathroom, but passed it and went straight through all of Cesis to my mom and dad, to tell them to come pick me up.

I'm walking in a ravine towards the main square and thinking about death. In my pajamas. Up to that point, I'd only been to one funeral – my grandfather's, in the far countryside. Everything was kind of heavy there – the air, the covers I had to sleep under, the rugs, the kitchen cabinets and spoons, and the bucket of potato skins. Heavy and sticky with something.

And my grandfather lay in the coffin in the barn – next to a pigsty and a heap of shit with a rooster always on top, stopping anyone from getting to the raspberries. All in one big mess. At the funeral, my mom's godmother gave her 50 lats with her condolences. My mom bought herself a coat with a fur trim with that money! And while I walk through the entire town in my hospital pajamas, I'm wondering what my mom's godmother would give her for my funeral...

Jacob rings the bell, freezing.

Zemgus. Who is it?

Jacob. It's me, dad...

Zemgus. Jacob?! *(He unlocks the door.)* Zelma, it's Jacob!

Zelma. Jacob, what are you doing here?!

Jacob. I just wanted to tell you...

Zelma. Yes?

Jacob. I just wanted to tell you that you have to come pick me up at the hospital.

Zelma. So what are you doing here? Hold on, I don't understand.

Zemgus. Come inside, what are you standing around for...

Zelma. *(Feels his clothes.)* Are you wearing your hospital clothes?!

Zemgus. Did they just let you leave, alone?

Jacob. I didn't...

Zemgus. Are you in trouble there?

Zelma. You're freezing!

Jacob. No, no trouble, it's all good...

Zelma. Dad, go make tea.

Zemgus. Do you want something to eat?

Jacob. No, I have to get back...

Zemgus. Stop this nonsense – you're not going anywhere!

Zelma. Tigger, but why didn't you ask to call us?

Jacob. I...

Zelma. Why didn't you just say that you have to call?

Jacob. I didn't get the chance, I got...

Zelma. Yes?

Jacob. I got...

Zelma. Well, what is it?

Jacob. *(Very silently.)* Ashamed.

Pause. Mom hugs Jacob. They both stand there for a moment.

Zemgus. *(From the kitchen.)* I hope the doctors are losing their crap at the hospital looking for you!

(Laughs.) You being here is their oversight, nothing else.

Jacob. *(To mom.)* Sorry.

Zelma. Tigger, dear...

Jacob. We have to go back now, get dressed...

Zelma. Stop that...

Jacob. I just wanted to warn you! So that you know and...

Zelma. Hush!

Jacob stops talking.

Zelma. Get in bed, your dad will bring you tea, and I'll get the fairy tale tapes.

Jacob. *And so I'm lying with my head buried in my mom's lap, she's rocking me. My dad calls the hospital and later gets our neighbor's grandson to take him there to do the paperwork and take my clothes, return the pajamas...*

Audio fairy tale turns on.

Jacob. Mom?

Zelma. Sleep, darling. You just sleep.

Jacob. *From then on, my mom started going to work less and less, and she spent more and more time in bed. I don't know why, but I felt responsible for all of that. I'd run home between school and study groups.*

Jacob. Hi!

No one responds.

Jacob. What do we have here? *(Opens the fridge.)* I'll make meatball soup, is that alright?

No one responds.

Jacob. *Not answering is really nasty. I took the necessary items out of the fridge, took a knife for peeling carrots, but the lack of answer was the only thing at the back of my head. I started the stove under the pot.*

Jacob. Mom?

Jacob lingers and waits, then goes inside mom's room.

Jacob. Mom?

Zelma. I can hear you...

Jacob. Oh, I just wanted to say hello.

Zelma. Hello...

Jacob. I'll make meatball soup, OK?

Zelma. Yes.

Jacob. I applied for the selected class today.

Zelma What?

Jacob. I applied for the selected class! We'll be regrouped into different classes next year. We had to do an hour-long test.

Zelma. And?

Jacob. What?

Zelma. Did you get in?

Jacob. I don't know yet, we'll see. I just figured, because...

Zelma. Because?

Jacob. Nothing, just thought it was cool.

Zelma. Did you forget to do your homework again?

Jacob. What?

Zelma. You think I wouldn't find out, but I know everything! You think nobody calls me from school to tell anything, right? You think you can play hooky, doing God knows what...

Jacob. I don't play hooky.

Zelma. You think you can fail your homework and get in the gymnasium! Fantastic. What's burning?

Jacob. *Burning where? I run to the kitchen – an empty pot is burning on the stove. In some sort of haze I grab it with my bare hands and throw it in the sink – it burns! The plastic rack in the sink is melting under the pot. It stinks.*

Zelma. Well?

Jacob. I forgot to pour water in the pot.

Zelma. Of course! Come here.

Jacob. *Mom's at the closet.*

Zelma. And what's that?

Jacob. A closet.

Zelma. And what's inside the closet?

Jacob. Clothes.

Zelma. Did you fold them?

Jacob. I...

Zelma. So make an effort! You know you can't just throw things in there as you please!

Jacob. They weren't thrown...

Zelma. What did you say?

Jacob. Nothing.

Zelma. Jacob, that mumbling of yours is killing me!

Jacob. I said I didn't throw them.

Zelma. So I'm imagining things?

Jacob. No.

Zelma. You know what...

Jacob. *With a single swing, all of the clothes from the closet are on the floor in front of my mom.*

Zelma. I'll tell you when they're not thrown.

Pause. Zelma sits down on the couch. Jacob is standing in a pile of clothes.

Zelma. Look at what you've done to me. I can't go to work, I can't go out. A nervous wreck. Putting the pot on an open flame – do you want us to burn down? What a nightmare. But that's how it goes – that's what I get as a thank you, right? That's right. That's alright. That's alright. *(Pause. Zelma cries.)* That's alright. That's alright...

Jacob. *I rearranged the closet countless times until it was finally acceptable. And even then – it was only for that moment and that day, and probably because mom got tired. Each following day,*

it would start over and over. I got into the selected class, but I didn't tell my mom.

*

Liene. Are you up?

Jacob. *At the age of thirteen, I got my first mobile phone from my dad's sister. A huge Nokia I was ashamed of, so I only kept it in my backpack. The best thing about the phone was texting. Who did I text? Liene from class C at school. For a couple of weeks now.*

Jacob. Opening bracket, space, dot, closing bracket, opening bracket, dot, space, closing bracket, comma.

Jacob. *That means my eyes are wide open and I'm smiling a little.*

Liene. Colon, capital D.

Jacob. What are you thinking about?

Liene. Nothing much. I have a geometry test tomorrow. Lame! Colon, opening bracket, opening bracket, opening bracket, opening bracket, opening bracket, opening bracket.

Jacob. Us, too. Colon, opening bracket, opening bracket, opening bracket, opening bracket, opening bracket, opening bracket, opening bracket, opening bracket, opening bracket.

Liene. Which period? Colon, capital O.

Jacob. Second. Capital I, opening bracket.

Liene. Fifth for us! Colon, capital P.

Jacob. I'll text you pointers after the test. Semi-colon, closing bracket.

Liene. You're the best. Colon, closing bracket.

Jacob. *Yes! Yes, yes, yes, yes! I'm screaming into my pillow under the covers, because it's late and I should be sleeping.*

Liene. Colon, asterisk.

Pause.

Jacob. Colon, asterisk.

Jacob. *Asterisk...*

Liene is tall, she's taller than me, and she is beautiful. Her jeans, whichever ones she has on, usually end at her ankles, but for some reason I like knowing the color of her socks. Each morning, my life starts with thoughts of Liene's socks. At school, I just feel good.

After school, I run home to make lunch for my parents before they return from work. My parents return in a rather good mood, mom has taken a large pile of mail out of the mailbox.

Zelma. Jacob, take a look, what's good?

Jacob looks through the letters.

Zelma. Is there a mail order catalog?

Jacob. No.

Zelma. Ah, I was hoping we could buy a new radio clock. Lyosha's granddad said the catalog has a porcelain owl. Might be beautiful.

Zemgus. A porcelain owl? I'm not so sure.

Zelma. Oh, what do you know. *(To Jacob.)* So what's in there?

Jacob. Some Christian magazine and the phone bill.

Zelma So read it...

Zemgus. The Christian thing?

Zelma. I mean the bill!

Zemgus. You got me worried...

Jacob. *(He opens the envelope and looks at the bill.)* Seven lats, thirteen santims...

Zelma and Zemgus at once. What?!

Jacob. Seven and thirteen...

Zemgus. Boy, have you lost your mind?! What are you doing with that phone?!

Zelma. Jacob, that's too much. That is way too much. We cannot have such bills!

Zemgus. I'm not going to live off of dry pasta because my sister gave you a mobile phone! Money doesn't grow on trees, damn it! There goes the porcelain owl...

Zelma. This is irresponsible.

Zemgus. I'll call Maira to come take her phone back.

Zelma. It's irresponsible towards us!

Jacob. I'm sorry.

Zemgus. And they say we have to give him pocket money, damn it! For talking! Seven and thirteen! For talking! For air!

Zelma. Who are you talking to so much?!

Jacob. I don't know, I wasn't even...

Zemgus. Sure – he doesn't talk, but we get a bill like that.

Zelma. I hope you're not buying those ringtones, what do you call them...

Jacob. Polyphonic.

Zelma. Yes, those. Are you?

Jacob. I can't even...

Zemgus. When you finally know how it feels to earn something, you'll see... Seven and thirteen!
What the hell!

Zelma. You just simply cannot do things like that...

Zemgus. *(To mom.)* Are you alright?

Zelma. Why are you asking me that as if I'm sick.

Zemgus. Darn it, boy... You have to connect your brain to the world a little bit.

Jacob. *I quickly stride into my room and turn my phone off to avoid the temptation to text Liene. I look at the phone bill. It clearly says – 35 lats and 87 santims. Where am I supposed to get that kind of money?! My parents will give me 7.13, but that leaves 28.74! I'm too young to be in a relationship, that's for sure.*
I'll get 7.13 from my parents, save up 4 from my pocket money if I skip lunch at school, and I will skip it. I will skip lunch forever! I'll skip a day of school, hitchhike to Riga to donate my plasma with a fake student ID – I'll get 7 lats from that. Gotta come up with something else...
A couple of days later I pull my pants almost up to my armpits and go to my mom.

Jacob. Mom, my pants are too short.

Zelma. What are you talking about? Go to your dad.

Zemgus. Show 'em here! *(Dad touches Jacob's ankles.)* They really are short!

Jacob. *I'm given 15 lats, and I go straight to Gerken & Co to steal clothes, so I could put the money in the phone bill envelope, and then I'll borrow 2.74 from Lauris. What a nightmare. That was truly a terrible nightmare. A couple of days later, I turn my phone back on.*

Jacob. Crazy bill. Capital X, underscore, capital X. You too?

Liene. Yes. My mom is furious.

Jacob. Wanna meet tomorrow at school under the stairs? Colon, closing bracket. The long break.
Ellipsis. I'll understand if you don't. Colon, opening bracket.

Liene. OK, let's meet! Colon, closing bracket, asterisk. I have to give the phone back to my mom.

Jacob. *I was sitting under the stairs at school and sweating. In order to look inconspicuous, I was reading my history book.*

Liene arrives.

Liene. Hey!

Jacob. Hey...

Liene. *(About the book.)* Do you have history class today?

Jacob. Yeah... *(Keeps reading the book.)*

Liene. Me too. *(Sits down next to Jacob.)*

Both sit and read, trying to touch each other ever so slightly. First romance. The bell rings.

Jacob. *And Liene smiled looking into my eyes – right into my eyes!*

Liene. I have to go.

Jacob. *And they say love is blind... And so we read the entire history book, then do some of the mandatory reading... After the phone bill disaster, Liene doesn't text me often, so when she does, it's about something big and important.*

Jacob. Can I go out with some friends?

Zelma. What friends?!

Zemgus. Are you a detective or something?

Jacob. Krisitis, Klavs, and Matiss...

Zelma. I don't like them.

Zemgus. You can go.

Jacob. Lauris is also there...

Zelma. Oh, I see...

Zemgus. I already said you could go.

Zelma. Why are you getting in the middle?

Jacob. I won't be long.

Zemgus. You don't have to report to us.

Zelma. Where's all this courage coming from? Yes, you do! You have two hours, Jacob. Not longer.

Jacob. Thank you!

Zemgus. Run along now!

Jacob. *And so I do.*

The evening is warm and beautiful. When I get to Festivala Street, I see Liene sitting on the pavement by a house.

Liene is smiling goofily and waving at me.

Jacob. Hey!

Liene. Hey.

Jacob. *(Goes up to Liene.)* What are you doing here?

Liene. *(Lifts her arms up to Jacob.)* Nothing...

Jacob helps Liene stand up. She giggles and bumps into him a little bit.

Liene. Oops! Sorry.

Jacob. *Liene is also warm and beautiful, and she sort of smells like cider.*

Jacob. Shall we?

Liene. Where to?

Jacob. I don't know... Aren't I supposed to walk you home?

Liene. So you just want to simply walk me home, close the door, and that's it?

Jacob. Well, no...

Liene. Boring...

Jacob. I just realized that...

Liene. We have all night! All of our lives! Everything! Let's go to Cirulisi!

Jacob. That's like 3 kilometers!

Liene. So what? Let's run then!

Jacob. *And she runs, laughs, looks back. I realize I have to follow her, but it seems kind of silly. It would be easier if she were standing. She might have all night, but I only have two hours...*

Liene. Are you coming?

Jacob. *I hesitate for a while. I want to tell her something, everything, but I turn around and walk away swiftly.*

Liene. Hey!

Jacob. *I don't look back and start moving faster.*

Liene runs after Jacob, stands in front of him.

Liene. What's wrong with you? Did I say something?

Jacob. No... I just... Maybe I can't just... Maybe I thought I'd just walk you home, but then you...
Never mind.

Jacob. I have to go.

Liene. *(Pulls out a pocket knife and opens it.)* Do you know what a blood pact is?

Jacob. Well, yeah...

Liene. Wanna do it? *(She cuts her finger; it bleeds.)* Oh fuck...

Liene giggles in shock. Jacob cuts a strip of his shirt and tries to stop the bleeding.

Jacob. *(Pressing the finger.)* I have to press down on your thumb to stop the bleeding. 10...9...8...
7...6...5...4...

Liene. *(Together with Jacob, looking in his eyes.)* 3...2...1...

Kiss.

Jacob. *Liene is my girlfriend. Officially. We've agreed on that, and people know at school, and she's the most beautiful thing that's ever happened to me. We go somewhere each night, and I tell her fairy tales, literally. She likes fairy tales as much as I did when I was a kid. We spend literally magical evenings, and I usually kiss her on the thumb scar. One such night, another, a third, and fourth one, two weeks, going on three...*

Zelma. You're killing me! *(Throws the contents of the closet on the floor.)* Wrong! Wrong – nobody folds pants like that, and nobody puts socks here!

Jacob tried to collect things from the floor.

Zelma. Have you no shame? And why are you standing here? *(Pushes Jacob away.)*

Jacob. *(Standing his ground.)* I'm trying to help you.

Zelma. Help me?! I wonder how?! By wandering around with girls?

Jacob. I only have one girl.

Zelma. Step aside!

Jacob. No. *(Collecting clothes.)*

Zelma. Oh, so now you won't listen?! You won't listen?! I'll show you. You just want to kill me, nothing more, but I'll show you... *(Grabs the belt.)*

Jacob grabs the other end of the belt.

Zelma. Let go.

Jacob. No.

Zelma. Let go!

Jacob. No.

Zelma. You think I don't know you're lying to me about parents' meeting times? Let go!

Jacob. No!

Zelma. I look like a fool in front of your teacher! A fool each time!

Jacob. It's not true.

Zelma. Yes, it is! Let go!

Jacob. *I hold the belt tightly, and it seems like time freezes. This is the first time I truly see my mom.*

She's a scared little girl who desperately wants the world to be good and great, safe. She wants to succeed, and for me to reflect that. But, my oh my, I'm proving the opposite.

Jacob. No! *I have broken her.* –

Silence. Zelma is crying. Jacob throws the belt away.

Jacob. Mom... Mom, I'm sorry. Mom, it's going to be fine, I'll reorganize the closet, don't worry!

We're not going to fight about a closet.

Mom, please don't cry. Liene has jeans that are always too short, and you can see the color of her socks, and this morning she had orange ones with blue butterflies on the sides – like our kitchen wallpaper. And she smells a bit like Auntie Daina, like lilly of the valley. Do you hear me? Don't cry. Do you want to meet her? We'll figure something out if you want. I thought perhaps you don't want to. Mom, just please don't cry.

Zelma. Go away...

Jacob. I just didn't want to get scolded, we can work everything out. I'm your Tigger... We can work everything out. Mom...

Zelma. *(Yells.)* Go away!

Jacob. *My mom is crying. Out loud. I can hear her.*

Jacob steps back, looks at his mom, cowering on the floor and crying. He goes to his dad.

Jacob. Dad! Hey!

Dad doesn't react and Jacob starts shaking him.

Jacob. Dad!

Zemgus. What is it?

Jacob. Mom's not feeling well!

Zemgus. What is it?

Jacob. She's crying, can't you hear?

Zemgus. It'll pass...

Jacob. Pass?! (Pause.)

Jacob. *I'm shaking my dad as hard as I can, instead of telling him how I hate it that he always goes to sleep, when he should stand up and fight, when he should talk and resolve everything, I hate it that he's sleeping while my mom is talking to me about my grades, about my friends, about me visiting the cemetery, I hate it, hate it, hate it! -*

Jacob. What's wrong with you?!

Zemgus. What is wrong with you?!

Jacob. Go hug her. She's crying.

Zemgus. You're the reason she's crying!

Jacob. *A man with messy hair is lying in front of me, his wife is crying in the dark in the next room, and it's all my fault, so what I want the most is for him to punch me, to hurt me, to do something, anything, just for the sake of doing it! But nothing happens, so I turn around and walk away, slamming the apartment door behind me.*

I run downstairs and push the front door. The spring broke years ago, and it reminds me of Wolf, whom I took to the forest to die. Murderer. I stride past Gerkens & Co, where I stole clothes to pay the phone bill. Thief. I'm fifteen, but I've never just gone somewhere without telling anyone. Wuss. But this time I run until I get to Saules Street. Hilarious – running out of the dark, straight to the street of the sun, only to realize I have nowhere to run. That's the entire truth.

*

Jacob. *I felt similarly real when my mom went to a therapist. She went to the therapist herself! But she took me as well.*

The therapist's office

Zelma. I can't even explain it... Like now – I reasonably know that we're at the therapist's office, and my safety island is this chair. And... it feels the same in life. I guess I'm always looking for safety islands, and once they rock, it seems that the world is shattering, and it's over. It's silly, I guess.

Therapist. Why is it silly?

Zelma. Well, not silly, but... I don't know.

Therapist. Are you talking in such broad terms because Jacob is here?

Zelma. No, why...

Jacob. *Silence.*

Zelma. It's also possible, yes, that Jacob is my sturdy chair... When Jacob was little, I managed everything and I was in charge, I was completely certain that I wanted a child, and I wouldn't even accept it if someone tried to tell me I'd be better off without him. No! I knew I would handle it. But apparently I was looking at my handling it short-term, and... The world changes all the time! And when the child also changes, when the thing you're so confident about changes, then... I don't know how to tell you. At first, it's important to follow his breathing, touch the nape to see if he's too hot or too cold. Alright, yes, at first I also had to keep his father away, so he wouldn't crush him, but otherwise... Then, the crawling starts – so you crawl with him. Then he starts grabbing everything and wants to walk, but he can't do it without you. We built a playpen. Then he starts walking on his own, but he's still scared of everything. And then there's this click, and he's not scared anymore, he has no brakes, nothing, and you can only rely on prayer and your senses as a mother. You learn to tell the difference in his breathing when he's lying or worried or happy. Nothing supernatural, but I've been thinking for a while that that's not enough either.

Therapist. Uh-huh.

Zelma. It's like when you walk a well-known road and suddenly there's a pit in front of you. And you may even know precisely where you're coming from, but at that moment, it's like no matter how confident you are, everything shakes. You move along familiar paths, go places you know well. But unexpected roadworks, a car parked where it's not allowed – for example, on

the sidewalk – tree branches, or some debris after renovations or storms, scaffoldings erected, or groups of kids who won't move aside – they're all unexpected obstacles you have to deal with. And you often have no idea what to do!

Therapist. Uh-huh... *(Writes a prescription.)*

Zelma. He... Jacob once even asked me how it was, what counts as him growing up, since he was forced to be born an adult. Just something...

Therapist. There's your prescription.

Zelma. That's it?

Therapist. Well... If you had gone mad, you'd be fine.

Zelma. I beg your pardon?

Therapist. As long as everything is bad, you're in no trouble – only the crazy ones think all is fine.

Jacob. Wait, what?

Therapist. If your mom takes the prescribed drugs and realizes that nothing tragic is actually happening, everything will be reasonably well.

Jacob. Reasonably well?

Zelma. Oh, Jacob.

Therapist. Is something bothering you?

Jacob. Oh no, it's all awesome! *(Laughs.)* Let's go home, mom! Everything is awesome!

Zelma. I actually wanted to ask if... perhaps you could talk to Jacob?

Jacob. What?

Zelma. Maybe you... maybe you're the one who needs help. I'll be outside.

Zelma goes outside.

Therapist. So, what's up?

Jacob. What's up? Nothing! Everything is fucking great! My mom is fine because she's doing bad, and so am I! And I'm sorry, I don't normally swear. I just... I feel really tense after what just happened here. You blew my mind.

Therapist. You have to cut your umbilical cord to your mom.

Therapist. *(Hands Jacob a notepad.)* Why don't you write a journal!

Jacob. Now?

Therapist. Why not.

Jacob. *So I write: “Knives, poison, and soaped up ropes may fail, but if you make a sturdy loop from a metal wire, a bit thicker than the one on bicycle brakes, tie it somewhere high, and put it around your neck, the question is not whether your neck would be held tight enough, but rather – whether or not your head would get ripped off.”*

I shove the notebook towards him, he reads for a while, and silence reigns.

Psihologs. So what’s held you back from such actions so far?

Jacob. I’m a good boy.

*

Jacob. *I return to my mom’s kitchen at 30, and I still feel like the boy who sees in the dark. I continue to try to get used to the idea that I’m not made up, but real, despite the fact that nobody can see me.*

Jacob. Mom?

Zelma. Yes? Did you wake your father?

Jacob. Yes, he’s coming. Mom?

Jacob goes up to his mom, takes her hands, and puts them against his face.

Jacob. I believe you haven’t seen me for quite some time...