

H I G H W A T E R

Daria Slyusarenko

Characters:

- * Sanya, 35 years old
- * Pasha, 37 years old
- * Crocodile
- * Mermaid
- * Deep sea fish

PART 1

We see long rows of dark garages. One of them is open, there is a warm light inside. There is a boat in the garage, but not a car. Sanya and Pasha drink vodka, sitting in the boat.

Sanya. Would you be a fucking friend already?

Pasha. Am I fucking not?

Sanya. A motherfucker, that's who you are.

Pasha. You are a motherfucker yourself.

Sanya. I mean, a friend is always there for you, he never leaves you, okay?

Pasha. Why? Am I leaving you?

Sanya. Sure, you always choose your bimbos over me.

Pasha. Well, those are bimbos...

Sanya. I don't give a shit. I want a friend.

Pasha. Okay. Explain then: what am I to do?

Sanya. Now, take my birthday: it should be your holy fucking day. You should put everything else aside and be at my place by morning. We drink, we eat, we joke, our gang goes on a bender. So that there are no excuses like being on a vacation, wife or lover. None of this bullshit.

Pasha. It's not my fucking fault that you were born in August.

Sanya. But it only makes it worse. Pasha, you know.

Pasha. I know. Stop obsessing.

Sanya. I'm not obsessing, Pasha, I'm fucking sick of it. I find a man, I mean, a friend, and we fucking hang out, and then one day he's got a fucking bimbo. And that's it. And I get it if it's just one, but it's always like this with you: first a wife, then a lover, and then some one-night stand while drunk. Why the fuck do you need all this? A wife should also be a friend, a one and true friend, and not this bullshit. I'll only marry if it's a real deal. A friend should also be for real, you know.

Pasha. Fuck knows. Why all these limits? I'm for freedom.

Sanya. What fucking freedom are you for exactly? You don't know shit, Pasha. Where's vodka?

Pasha. Here you go.

Sanya. I've seen some shit in my life, like I had to choose from two options only: to end up here or at the cemetery, see?

Pasha. What?

Sanya. I mean, do you think I want to spend my whole life here? I'm forty-five, it's time for me to get back to Moscow. It's different there now; it's nothing like it used to be. You should come with me. You should just give it all up. Like there is something to give up here.

Pasha. Er... I don't know...

Sanya. You said you were for freedom, didn't you? So, freedom is there.

Pasha. And what about Irka?

Sanya. And Svetka? No bimbos, Pasha, us only, us friends. To Moscow.

Pasha. And what are we going to do there?

Sanya. Business, Pasha.

Pasha. Well, I don't know.

They both drink. Sanya strikes the boat with his hand.

Sanya. We'll sail there and patent it. Are you following me? I invented this.

Pasha. A boat?

Sanya. It's not just a bloody boat. It's portable. Like a bicycle, only it's a boat. It's fucking handy.

Pasha. So, what, who needs a boat in Moscow anyway?

Sanya. Everybody will want one as soon as we bring it there.

Pasha. Oh, I'm not so sure...

Sanya. You're my friend, aren't you?

Pasha. Hand me some more vodka.

Sanya. It's gone.

Pasha. Okay, I'm off then.

Sanya. Where to? We'll get more vodka at the store.

Pasha. Irka's waiting for me, she'll be... Well, you know, how she always is...

Sanya. This bullshit again. Are will still sailing to Moscow?

Pasha. Sanya...

Sanya. I see. Off you go.

Pasha. See you. Happy birthday by the way.

Sanya. Right, yeah.

Staggering, Pasha goes into darkness. Sanya pulls another bottle of vodka out of the boat and gulps it down.

Sanya. I've a fucking sissy for a friend. Keep sitting tight then. Stay trapped here. I'll sail alone. I'll just finish the oars – so that I can row while sitting face forward, because everybody else rows sitting backward, such losers – and I'll sail off. And I'll come to Moscow, fucking heading forward, and I'll start it all over.

PART 2

Sanya folds the boat which is not easy. The boat is foldable, but still very heavy. Sanya huffs. Finally, the boat folds in half. It resembles a cropped coffin.

Sanya. How about that?

Sanya tries to put the boat on top of the car which is even harder. The boat scratches the car.

Sanya. Fuck.

Sanya puts it up there. Fixes it. Gets into the driver's seat and starts the engine. Pasha emerges from behind the garages.

Pasha. Sanya!

Sanya. What?

Pasha. I'm sailing to Moscow too!

Sanya. Why?

Pasha. I'm fed up with Irka's jealous shit.

Sanya. And what about Svetka?

Pasha. Svetka's as well. I'm fed up with those bimbos, you know.

Sanya. I told you so. We'll be fine, we'll get our business going and the bimbos will be all over us. It'll be fucking hilarious, trust me.

Pasha. Okay.

Sanya. Take a seat.

Pasha. Sanya, I just learned that...

Sanya. Huh?

Pasha. You can't just sail into Moscow like this. The water flows out of the city, you know, and not into it.

Sanya. So what?

Pasha. Well, you'd be going upstream. Not sure you can do this by boat. By train, maybe.

Sanya. Are you crazy?

Pasha. What?

Sanya. Any fool can go by train. And we are no fools, no.
We'll go by boat. I don't give a fuck about your river course.
Are you coming with me or not?

Pasha. Okay, I am...

Sanya. Get in then, stop fooling around.

Pasha gets in. They drive for a little while, stop by a river and get out of the car. By the river, there are women, children and fat bellied men with beers in their hands.

Sanya. Give me a hand.

Sanya and Pasha pull the boat down from the top of the car. Under the gaze of the outdoorsmen, they drag it over the sand to the water. Pasha is worried.

Pasha. Listen, is it even legal?

Sanya. Sailing?

Pasha. Well, that far...

Sanya. Don't be a pussy, and it will be.

They stop by the water. Sanya unfolds the half-folded boat. Sanya and Pasha launch it into the water together.

Sanya. Fuck, the oars. Hold it.

Sanya runs back to the car to get the oars. Pasha stays by the boat. He's self-conscious, as everybody is looking at him. He smiles awkwardly. Sanya comes back with the oars.

Sanya. Okay, hop in.

Pasha. Listen, man, I don't know...

Sanya. That's it, enough of this shit. It's your last chance, I swear. Are you a friend or a motherfucker?

Sanya extends his hand to Pasha. Pasha hesitates. The women around are intrigued.

Pasha spits to the side, grabs Sanya's hand and climbs into the boat. Sanya pushes off from the shore with the oars. They sail off.

Pasha. Sanya.

Sanya. Huh?

Pasha. Do we have any food?

Sanya. We'll catch some. Think positive, Pasha, and it'll be all right.

They sail. Pasha tries to think positively. His small hometown, which he has never left before, is gradually sinking below the horizon together with all the women, their children and fat bellied beer drinking men, as well as Irka and Svetka. Sanya rows, sitting face forward, as planned, so that his back is turned to Pasha.

PART 3

Night falls. The starry sky is hanging above Sanya and Pasha. There is nothing but the sky: there are stars both above them and reflected in the water.

Sanya. Do you know the constellations, Pasha?

Pasha. I know the dipper.

Sanya. I also only know the dipper. And in general, I don't like it.

Pasha. The dipper?

Sanya. No, not the dipper. I don't like that constellations should be the same for everybody. Why should I know them like this?

Pasha. Well, it's like science.

Sanya. This is not science. The fact that there are Jupiter and Mars, or else – that's science. But I can decide for myself what stars look like, thanks. I'm not blind after all, right?

Pasha. Right.

Sanya. So, there is a boat.

Pasha. Where?

Sanya. To the left, see? Just connect those in your mind.
There's the boat. And we are in the boat. That's cool, right?

Pasha. I can't see the boat though...

Sanya. Well, just take a proper fucking look.

Pasha. It looks like a maw.

Sanya. Well, maw looks kind of like a boat, so...

Pasha. Maybe...

Sanya. And there's a plane over there. We'll buy ourselves one as soon as we get things going. A small one, of course, for ten people, so that we can get around the world.

Pasha. Could we fly home then?

Sanya. Why the hell would you go home?

Pasha. Well...

Sanya. Forget about home, Pasha. It was never your home. It's just that you were unlucky enough to be born there, you know.

Pasha. But it's kind of beautiful there, they say.

Sanya. So what?

Pasha. Over there, look, it looks like our lake. It's almost like there are trees around it.

Sanya. It looks like the Kremlin.

Pasha. Sometimes, when I'm sad, I imagine myself like on this Earth, and the Earth is kind of in space, you see? And then I kind of zoom it all out, I scale it out: like here I am lying in a bed, in a city, seen from a bird's eye view and from even farther, and you almost can't see me through the clouds already, and then – I am seen from the space, and there is the Moon, and the Earth looks just like a ball from up there. And this earth-ball is spinning around in this enormous space, minding its own business.

And there are other planets as well, they all are like gassy and under these wild temperatures, so, they have their own things going on. Anyways, there is the Sun, something always exploding on its surface. And the Earth is already looking teeny-tiny from up there. And then I think: there is me on that Earth. I'm just like a kind of sand grain, or even smaller than a sand grain. But it doesn't bother me; it doesn't piss me off at all, on the contrary, it's even reassuring in the way that all my problems immediately seem to shrink to this sand grain scale, and I just unwind, you know.

And now I also think, like fuck it, I'm cold, why did I even get into this shit? I'm hungry as hell, and we have nothing to eat, we didn't even bother to bring any food, we didn't think it through. And then, I'm up there already among the stars, looking down, and it's all good. It's just us on a boat, sailing through this huge space while others are doing their things. And it's just fun. As we all are just sand grains. So, you know...

Sanya. Did you know that deep-sea fish explode when brought to the surface quickly?

Pasha. How do you know that?

Sanya. Read it somewhere. So, we'll rise as well, but we won't explode.

Pasha. And why won't we?

Sanya. Because really, well, in our hearts, we are not the deep-sea ones. We just found ourselves in the wrong place.

Pasha. But it depends on the pressure. If they are already at a certain depth...

Sanya. Don't geek out. We won't explode, I'm telling you.

Pasha. And how long do we have to sail exactly?

Sanya. Quite long.

They sail. Pasha lies down, watching the stars. In his mind, he's flying up to the Moon, and then to the Sun. Sanya rows and imagines his muscles pumping up thanks to it.

PART 4

It's morning. They keep sailing. It's hard to tell how much time has passed: how many hours or days. Pasha's cheeks had thinned; his cheek bones started to show. Sanya's face is weathered.

Sanya. You know, I never got it: why don't people want to change their lives? They are just stuck in it, just stay in the deep of it.

Pasha. What are you talking about?

Sanya. On the way back from my shift, as I went to our place by the L Bus, I met this woman.

Pasha. When?

Sanya. A couple of months ago.

Pasha. So what?

Sanya. Nothing, but it was very romantic. I asked her straight away if she was available. She said she was. She introduced me to her mother and son.

Pasha. And?

Sanya. Well, I was off for a week, remember? I left, and it was it, not a word from her. Fucking hilarious. Her phone was off, total ghosting. I didn't get it; I was in a really bad mood. And the next day, she texted me saying that they got back together with her ex. Like it was a two-and-a-half-year thing, then they broke up, and now they are back together. I don't get it. I don't get it at all. It was just fucking beaten by it. Why the fuck would you do that? I said like you should have fucking told me that it was just a fling, no feelings whatsoever, don't fall for me.

I mean... She didn't say a word. And she already introduced me to her mother and son. I wonder, how does she look them in the eyes? The son, especially. He's onto it, you know: there was one man, and then another. If I were him, I wouldn't get her at all. I told her that we should all meet, all three of us, together with this ex of hers: to talk things through, to get an understanding. She said, "You don't know him; he won't step back anyway." And why do you think that I will? And her main argument is that they've been together for two and a half years!

I lived with my ex for ten years, so what? People break up after 15 or 20 years. Why stay stuck in this swamp? I thought about getting back with my ex, but what's the point? She's who she is, I am who I am, and you can't really change it. There will be this everyday routine, arguments, fights; who needs all that? Was it good? Yes, it was, but then something broke; you can never tell what happens next. And I said to her, "You'd call me later when drunk. I promise that you will."

Pasha. People don't like to change their lives.

Sanya. But what if this life is bad, Pasha?

Pasha. How would you know what's bad for whom? And again, even if it is bad, it's a habit already.

Sanya. So what? Living it to death just out of a habit?

Pasha. You can do so.

A crocodile swims towards Pasha and Sanya. We can only see its hungry eyes and the top of its head.

Sanya. What's that?

Pasha. A crocodile.

Sanya. Fuck me.

Pasha. Hit it with your oar.

Sanya. Right, you hit him.

Pasha. Why?

Sanya. It'll eat me up together with the oar.

The crocodile opens its mouth wide.

Crocodile. Gentlemen, which way is the shore?

Sanya. What?

Crocodile. Where's the shore? I can't find it.

Sanya. That way.

Sanya swings the oar backwards.

Pasha. I mean, we came from there.

Crocodile. And where are you going?

Sanya. To Moscow.

Crocodile. You've got it wrong then.

Pasha. Are we sailing the wrong way?

Crocodile. It's just wrong. There is no one like us there.

Sanya. There is at the zoo.

Crocodile. Do you want to end up in a zoo?

Pasha and Sanya glance at each other.

Crocodile. Ok, I'm bored. I'm going to the shore. Come along if anything.

Pasha. Go ahead then.

The crocodile swims away. Pasha and Sanya keep sailing in silence. It's not clear what to say after this exchange.

PART 5

At a great depth, a deep-sea fish swims under Pasha and Sanya. It's not clear what it is doing in the river, but maybe Pasha and Sanya are not sailing the river anymore: the banks are nowhere to see. It's calm. There is only endless blue water around. The fish looks up and thinks: "Why not jump out of the water?" It dives to the very bottom and moves its fans back and forth, like a cat swishes its tail, thrusts off the bottom and flies up. The fish jumps out of the water in front of Pasha and Sanya and explodes.

PART 6

Pasha. Sanya, did you ever feel like you were frozen?

Sanya. Huh?

Pasha. Well, I mean... Let me phrase it... You know, as if you are frozen inside, and it shows in everything. You want to grab a beer, but you can't feel your hand, as if it's not yours even. And everything feels like it. Like you are a heavy, slippery and clumsy piece of ice; and everything is... Like just yesterday you loved a person, and you felt this thing, but today it's like it has been put in a freezer, and you can't take it out of it.

Sanya. I'm not sure.

Pasha. So, I feel like if I'll make a big change, I'll be defrosted, just like a freezer, and I am making these changes....

Sanya. Like what?

Pasha. Well, for one, I went with you.

Sanya. Were you frozen?

Pasha. I was.

Sanya. So, has it changed?

Pasha. Well, I don't know.

Sanya is silent. He basically understands Pasha, but he doesn't know what to say about it. Pasha launches a coin to jump on the water. It jumps far away, so that we can't see where it stops. But in a few seconds, it jumps back into Pasha's hands. Pasha is intrigued. He launches it again. The coin jumps on water, but still gets back to him.

Something is kicking water with its tail: with a huge tail that doesn't look like a whale or a fish tail. A mermaid emerges from the water, swims up to the boat and leans on it, causing the boat to lie over on one side.

Sanya. Honey, we can go overboard like this.

Mermaid. Come on then, I'll take you to my kingdom.

Pasha. And what kind of kingdom is that?

Mermaid. An underwater kingdom. There is a king and his subjects, and I am a princess.

Sanya. Right, we got our own king and subjects up here; it's no way to surprise us.

Mermaid. But we are a democracy. The king is elected.

Pasha. So, if another king is chosen, you are no longer a princess?

Mermaid. Yes, I'll stop being one.

Sanya. We are not interested then.

Mermaid. You jerk.

Pasha. Can I become a king?

Sanya. You are no king! While I could be one.

Mermaid. It's high time for terrestrials there now, they've very high ratings.

Sanya hits the mermaid on the head with his oar, and she disappears underwater.

Pasha. Why did you do this?

Sanya. When was the last time we ate?

Pasha. Back home?

Sanya. And how long have we been sailing already?

Pasha. About a week, probably.

Sanya. We just started hallucinating.

Pasha. We could die like this.

Sanya takes a crumpled pack of cigarettes and a lighter out of his pocket. Pasha looks for a mermaid in the water, but she has disappeared for good. The water stretches to the left and to the right, forward and backward; there is nothing around but water.

Pasha. Sanya.

Sanya. What?

Pasha. And what if there is nothing else left out there?

Sanya. What do you mean?

Pasha. What if there was never anything out there? Neither our town, nor Moscow, nor Pernambuco...

Sanya. Perna-what?

Pasha. Pernambuco. It's in Brazil, in the northwest. I once looked it up online. I always wanted to go to Brazil...

Sanya. So what?

Pasha. Nothing. I only leave our town to visit my mom at her village... Well, I mean... Maybe there is no land at all, maybe we've always been in this boat and will stay here forever. Maybe we died already?

Sanya lights a cigarette. Drags on it. Smoke rises in a steady stream. Sanya watches it thoughtfully.

Sanya. Dead calm.

Pasha. Exactly. Give me a smoke.

Sanya hands Pasha a cigarette. Pasha drags on it. Smoke rises in a steady stream.

PART 7

Pasha wakes up to a mermaid stroking his cheek. Sanya snores so that the water ripples rhythmically around the boat.

Pasha. So, you came back?

Mermaid. I came back for you. You wanted to come with me, didn't you?

Pasha. In fairy tales, they always say that you can't trust mermaids.

Mermaid. Who else could you trust then?

Pasha. I have a wife, you know

Mermaid. That's not a problem.

Pasha. It's not. I also have a mistress. Only, I don't trust either of them. I don't trust anyone at all, not even myself. From the age of ten, don't know, maybe even earlier, I wanted to know what love was. And it's embarrassing, you know, I'm a guy, usually girls think about love...

Mermaid. Only guys think so.

Pasha. I don't know, so... I was waiting for the fireworks. Like in the movies. Like when I see a girl, and everything suddenly becomes colorful, you know? Especially, in our town, everything is fucking gray there. It's probably different down there where you come from. Like the herring-gray, you know, our whole town is just like that. And I thought that when I'd see HER, it all would stop being gray. And then you could tolerate this life, do you get me?

Mermaid. I guess, I do.

Pasha. So, I was growing up, I've been looking at the girls, but there were no colours. The town was gray, and the girls were gray, everything was fucking gray. And I looked at myself in the mirror one day, and realized that I was gray too.

Mermaid. You don't look gray to me.

Pasha. Let me finish. Then this happened: I liked a girl. And it wasn't all colorful, still for the first time, I really liked a girl. But she wasn't that great. I mean in general. She sucked. And my friends were mocking her.

Mermaid. And you?

Pasha. And I was silent. Like a fish.

Mermaid. Fish isn't silent.

Pasha. And I said nothing.

They both keep silence.

Mermaid. And then what?

Pasha. Nothing. Then I got married. Then I got a mistress. And then I sailed off. By the way, don't you know how far the shore is?

Mermaid. What shore?

Pasha. Any shore, at this point.

Mermaid. There are no more shores.

Pasha. How come?

Mermaid. Didn't you hear? All shores were abolished. There is nowhere else to sail.

Sanya makes a loud snore and wakes up to it.

Sanya. Huh?

Pasha. Huh?

Pasha is distracted by Sanya and when he turns back, the mermaid is gone already. The shore is gone as well.

PART 8

In the dead of night, the mermaid touches Pasha's cheek with her damp, cold hand.

Mermaid. Let's sail home, Pasha. Irka is there. Svetka is there. Let's go.

Pasha opens his eyes and sees the mermaid. She has a face of the girl that he once loved.

Pasha. Let's go.

The mermaid carefully pulls Pasha out of the boat, immerses him into the water and drags him with her – not home, but to the underwater kingdom.

PART 9

Sanya wakes up alone in the boat. There is no trace of Pasha. Sanya takes the last cigarette out of a crumpled pack and lights it. There is still only water around.

Sanya. Are you my friend or are you a motherfucker?

No one answers Sanya. Sanya lies down in the boat, stretching his thin body to full length, looks first at the clouds, then at the stars, and then again at the clouds. Once in a while, they look like the lake back home and the trees around it. But Sanya already knows that the mermaid was right – there are no more shores. There is no Moscow. There is only water.

Many days later, mermaids wrap their hands around the boat with Sanya lying in it, fallen asleep forever. They drag him to the bottom to hide him in the mud next to his friend Pasha as heroes who tried to cross the high water.

In honor of the heroes, fish is released from the depths to the surface, it rushes up, jumps out of the water, manages to breathe just once and explodes.

