A Good Forecast

by Olha Cherkai

"Is it certain?" I asked, gripping the wooden armrest of the chair tightly.

The man quickly glanced over the documents laying in front of him on the table. Key words were highlighted with a yellow marker.

"It's definitely bad news," he said, raising his eyes to meet mine, "but right now... it's very important for you to stop worrying and continue living your life..."

I sank tiredly into the chair. Surprisingly, hearing the diagnosis in a foreign language was easier than in my native tongue. It felt like they were talking about someone else. Like it was a Hollywood film, and I was in the cinema with popcorn, empathizing with the main character and thanking God it wasn't me.

He continued speaking. I listened, holding on until the last second, until I stepped outside the hospital doors. Having reached the car, I opened the door and, clutching it, tried to breathe.

I don't know what a person should do when this demon visits them... Cry, scream? I came home, laid on the bed, and stared at the ceiling for an hour or two. Then I felt like listening to Queen. I hadn't done that since school. But I wanted to hear the songs where Freddie, with a pale face, sings about how the show must go on, celebrating life in vibrant, harlequin-style costumes with feathers and bright pink wigs.

To fall asleep at night, I took a pill. Yet around four in the morning, I woke up anyway. My thoughts spiraled with unstoppable force. What to do next? Or not do it? Fear or stop fearing? Should I wait for the next operation, wait for life to start again, or live? And a question that took my breath away and quickened my heartbeat: what will happen to my family when I'm gone? Then I remembered how it all began.

"It seems you should see someone else," the dermatologist at a private Spanish clinic had said two months ago, lowering her voice as she added, "...it's better to go to an oncologist with this."

After that, everything was like a fog. Finding a specialist, numerous consultations, diagnoses, the first surgery, and of course, the results. It was a bit amusing that just that morning, my biggest problem seemed to be the war. It seemed to strip me of any illusion that I had even the slightest control over life or death. By evening, I found myself between Homer's Scylla and Charybdis, thinking of the ancient Greeks... And then I remembered I had tickets to Greece, where I was supposed to go on vacation. Or not go anymore?

In the morning, I pulled myself together, began to read about the disease, and like any well-behaved cancer patient, started seeking a second and third opinion.

"...the best in his field," a friend assured me over the phone. "And you know, he agreed to consult with you online. It's just that usually, oncologists don't consult online."

I tried to recall the last time I'd seen him. Eighteen, twenty years ago? Never did I think I'd cross paths with an ex under such circumstances.

I found him on Facebook and began tapping my fingers on the phone screen: "Hi! How are you?" The message was read instantly. To prevent him from imagining anything nostalgically romantic, I quickly added, "I need a favor."

On a Sunday morning, I was, as usual, making an omelet with tomatoes and cheese.

"Sun is shining, the weather is sweet," Bob Marley's voice came from the radio. I've always liked Bob Marley. Now even more—we're the same age after all, and we suffer from the same illness. He smoked a lot of marijuana and basked in the Jamaican sun? I did none of that, and that's the most infuriating aspect of this disease.

I sat on the balcony to eat breakfast. Outside the closed window, a bumblebee buzzed. It was quite unexpected to see it in October. Don’t they die at the end of the season? I thought. How heavy is its body anyway? How does it even fly with those small wings?

I wanted to call the kids to the table, but the phone rang. It was my ex, now my current oncologist. Before picking up, I stared at the floor for a few seconds. Composing myself, I finally answered the call.

"I went through everything," he said.

One must admit, his voice, unchanged over the years, was calm and confident. He explained everything in detail.

"So how much... how much time do I have?" I asked.

"Listen, I don't..."

"I just have tickets to Greece for the end of November," I explained. "Should I cancel?"

"If your Spaniards successfully perform the surgery, then the forecast... is good... You’ll fly to Greece, and to many other places. By the way, won't it be cold in Greece?"

"End of the season," I replied. "Weather varies."

"Make sure you don't catch a cold."

"Alright. You know... For me, it's important to understand at least approximately," I said.

He was silent.

"I remember you once wanted to write a novel, did you start?"

"No."

"Then start," he said.

Now it was my turn to be silent.

"Are you still there?" he asked.

"Yes," I said.

After our conversation, I sat motionless in the chair for a few more minutes. I wanted to go online and read everything, but instead, I opened the weather forecast for Greece in November. Cloudy, no rain. Perhaps this was the best forecast of all possible ones.

I approached the window and looked into the yard. The wind swayed the palm trees. Two children played with a cat in the shade of a lemon tree, under a blue sky. I wanted to call them to eat; the omelet had long gone cold, but my attention was caught by the buzzing. The bumblebee was still struggling against the glass. I covered it with a glass and a cloth napkin, took it to the open window—and released it. The bumblebee immediately flew into the twilight.