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Chapter 1

About the prevision and kinship

On that day, Maxim woke up very early. As mother and father were still asleep, he strolled through the apartment and waited until they woke up. He wanted to tell them that this morning was the first time he had his prevision.

Just for the record, all the adults in his family had previsions and premonitions. Maxim's mother, for example, always felt and suspected something terrible, which fortunately was rarely fulfilled. Maxim's father, on the contrary, had only optimistic visions, which also were only rarely fulfilled. The whole kinship was in this sense very sensitive, except for Maxim. He had none of these foresights. And now something had finally appeared to him – a bit unclear as with his mother but as cheerful as with his father.

Maxim felt that he could no longer wait and had to tell someone about it immediately. He approached the phone, trying to decide whether to call his uncle Sasha, who didn't really look like an uncle and was always ready to join Maxim in his games and pranks. The uncle had just graduated from high school and toyed with the idea of becoming a famous doctor. He was much older than his nephew, but as Maxim's grandmother said, not much more intelligent.

Sasha immediately picked up the phone.

"Paracelsus on the line," the sleepy voice rasped.

"Hi," said Maxim, by no means astonished by his uncle calling himself thus. He recently told everyone that he had decided to call himself Sasha Paracelsus in honor of the great medieval doctor and reformer of medicine. He even went so far as to sign the university's application form using the doctor's full name, Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, and it was promptly rejected. Only Grandma's tears and Mom's pleas defeated Sasha's stubbornness, making him change the application form. Now Paracelsus was awaiting feedback from the university.

"Oh, it's you, my little monster," said the uncle. "What's up?"

"I had a prevision," Maxim stammered in excitement.

"I had a premonition," Sasha replied sarcastically.

"What's the difference?" Maxim wondered.

"The difference is that a premonition is very unpleasant!"

"Which is..."

"That I will not be accepted into the university!" retorted Sasha and hung up.

Maxim feared that his prevision could also turn into a premonition.

Terrified, he decided not to tell anyone about it, since adults can easily spoil joy for any child. Hence, when his parents finally woke up, he told them nothing and nobody noticed his absentminded expression. But when he ate less than half of his oatmeal at breakfast, his mother began to worry about him.

“So, what’s going on?” she asked Maxim, sounding as if the world were about to perish.

Maxim remained silent as he was absorbed by the thought of what would now become of his own prevision.

But it continued to grow into the PREVISION par excellence!

Something had to happen, something very mysterious but pleasant. Maxim had no more doubts.

Grandma was to visit them after breakfast. Maxim loved her very much, although he was a bit disappointed that she did not look like an ordinary grandma. According to him, a real grandmother should be old and gray-haired, knit sweaters, and make strawberry jam, just like Andrew’s grandma from the fourth floor. Maxim’s grandmother, on the other hand, was still young and dynamic, held an important position in her company, and had no intention to retire in the next 20 years.

Maxim also had a great-grandma. The word “great-grandma” would seem to take him back to the Stone Age, or cave-dwellers. One of Maxim’s classmates, red-haired Peter, had a great-grandma – very old and hunchbacked, her face full of wrinkles.



In contrast, any ordinary grandmother could be envious of Maxim's great-grandma. She was a slender, spontaneous, and an

enterprising woman. No one knew how old she was, and when asked, she said that people were as old as they felt. And since she felt young, she still worked as a designer for the best fashion house in town.

The clock in the living room struck 12. At the last bell, the door opened, and on the threshold appeared a graceful and cheerful woman. It was Grandma – extremely punctual as always.

“It is not difficult to be punctual,” her neighbors commented enviously, “when you have a limousine with a chauffeur at your disposal.” And they were right because Grandma always travelled in a big black Mercedes that was as elegant as her chauffeur, who always looked gloomy and whose face did not show the slightest emotion. Maxim liked Grandma a lot, although his father thought the mother-in-law was spoiling the child with all the attention, which Maxim did not understand at all.

Grandma was coming to visit a few times a week and was taking Maxim on a tour of the city, either to the park or the museum. Sometimes they went to the toy or computer shops where Grandma would buy everything the grandson wanted. Maxim especially liked the craft department, from which he towed a bunch of model aircraft and ships – in a word, all that his soul desired. Grandma found this to be much better than most of the computer games, and it was the only point of agreement with her son-in-law.

Mom would say the whole thing was not educative at all and that she did not like this kind of upbringing. In some wise book, she had read that the number of toys should be limited, or else the child would be spoiled. She had a long argument with

Grandma, who managed to convince Mom that toys stimulate a child's imagination.

Sometimes Dad switched his allegiance between Mom's and Grandma's views. But at the end Grandma would buy Maxim a new toy. And maybe that was not so pedagogically rational, yet Maxim liked it nonetheless.

Chapter 2

Maxim's prevision is confirmed

Today Grandma took Maxim to a toy store. She wanted to buy him a present for the beginning of the school year.

“Sure,” she emphasized on the way, “this will be a special present, not a simple child’s toy, since you are a big boy now.”

For half an hour Maxim was wandering between the shelves full of toys noticing along the way that the great model railroad, which he had dreamed of for so long, no longer interested him. Grandma suggested buying something useful, stimulating, a puzzle, for example.

“No, no, not that,” the grandson shook his head.

Maxim’s gaze slid from shelf to shelf and suddenly he felt himself being watched. He looked in all directions, however around him were adults and children who did not pay any

attention to him. Maxim took another look at the shelves and noticed a little bear sitting in the corner behind a large plush lion. On another occasion, he would not have noticed such a toy, but this time he could not look away. It seemed as if the bear had blinked at Maxim. He was so taken aback that he blinked in response, just in case. Then the bear blinked again!

“Oh!” It was all that Maxim could utter. His mouth open, he pointed his finger at the toy. “Oh!”

“What’s wrong?” asked Grandma, disappointed with the manners of the grandson. “Well-mannered boys do not point their fingers!”

“Grandma, I’ve decided. Please buy me the bear over there!”

“What for?” wondered Grandma. “Aren’t you too old for such a thing? Besides, look at the color of his fur...”

Maxim was embarrassed. He felt as if the bear could hear and understand their conversation. He said that he was recently at the zoo and the bears had the same fur color.

“Without a doubt,” a salesman, who just happened to be standing by, chimed in, “this is the typical bear color.”

Maxim did not realize at first that the salesman spoke to them because his eyes were looking in another direction.

“Our shop,” the salesman continued, “has only one such toy. It is just a fortunate coincidence you came here and noticed it.”

The salesman took the bear off the shelf, shook it a little, so that the dust cloud came up and then settled on the floor, and put it on the counter.

“It’s so sweet,” said Maxim, looking straight at the bear.

The bear had red boots on, green checkered pants, and a blue hat.



“Why does it have a tail?” asked Grandma, visibly suspicious. “As far as I know bears don’t have tails.”

“But Madam,” the salesman replied convincingly, “every bear would take it as a shame not to have a tail!”

Then he turned to Maxim (although his eyes were already looking in another direction), “You were at the zoo recently. Tell your grandmother that bears do have tails.”

Maxim thought briefly and said, “No, they do not have them.” Then it dawned on him and he said, “Yes, they have tails!”

Now Grandma was not so sure. The show “The World of Animals” had aired on TV last week. There were bears too, and so it seemed ... Yes, yes, they had tails. She looked at the tail more closely and announced that this tail would fit a lion, not a bear.

“You should understand, this is not just a tail but an electrical cable, with the help of which the computer toy can run even without batteries,” said the salesman, proud of the construction.

“Oh, Grandma, that’s a computer bear! You see, he even has buttons on his belly.” Maxim was fascinated and turned to the salesman, “What can it do?”

The salesman pulled the manual out of the box and began to read. He read as if he had memorized it, because his eyes were not on the paper but somewhere, apparently over Maxim’s head.

“The above-mentioned toy has the following functions: First, moving. Second, solving of light mathematics problems. Third, speaking. In short, the toy can do everything,” he turned to Grandmother, “please read through the details yourself, if you can.”

“What do you mean “if you can”? Do you think I am illiterate to the point of not being able to read and understand a manual?”

“Hand on my heart, you are one of the most educated women with whom I have been talking lately. What I meant by this is that the font is very small.”

Grandmother pulled an elegant case from her pocket, opened it, and put on her glasses. Then she took the instructions and read, “LION.”

“Excuse me, but I believe that is the manual for the poor lion whose tail the bear has appropriated.”

“But no, “LION” is only an abbreviation. “L” stands for Logical, “I” – for Indestructible, “O” – for Original,” said the salesman patiently.

“And “N”?” asked Grandma.

“May be for Nonpareil ... or Newcomer...”

“Surely, both of them – a nonpareil newcomer,” added Grandmother sneering. “It’s not a teddy bear, it’s a Terminator!”

Grandmother put the manual aside and said that the toy was surely defective, that there is a reason no one was buying it, and that this must be not the first year for this creature in the shop judging by the dust on its fur.

But the grandson would not give up: “Buy me this teddy bear! I beg you, buy me the bear!”

“The boy made a good choice,” the salesman supported Maxim, for which Maxim was very grateful – if only the man was not looking in another direction.

“I understand your enthusiasm,” said Grandmother suspiciously. “You want to get rid of old goods. Well, how much do you ask for it?”

“One hundred Euros and a cent.”

“What a strange price! What is this additional cent for?”

“That’s the extra charge for the enchantment,” he whispered to Grandma.



“But I am not enchanted by it.”

“You have to understand,” the salesman whispered, “the magic is inherent!”

“This brings the barrel to overflow!” Grandmother looked extremely annoyed. “Put this beast back in its place, we are looking for a high-quality toy.”

Maxim hugged the bear to his chest and shook his head defiantly.

“Either you buy me this or I never play the piano again!”

“Ah, Maxim! With your talent!” Grandmother tried to flatter his self-esteem.

Though Maxim was not convinced.

“Just like the father,” said Grandmother somewhat disappointed. “After all, *Paris vaut bien une messe*.”

Maxim did not understand the meaning of the last words. Grandmother often used foreign languages, however when she marched to the cash register, he realized she was defeated.

“Give this precious thing to your ally,” Grandmother directed Maxim, when the salesman handed her the receipt. “It should be nicely packed, not to scare the people outside.”

Grandmother could be very scornful and make her subordinates in the company tremble. However, Maxim was not afraid since Grandmother was used to giving commands as a manager, while at home she would do what Maxim wanted.

They went out with the gift box, and Maxim asked, “The salesman was very friendly, wasn’t he?”

“Yes!” Grandma said.

“But a bit odd, right?”

“Why?” Grandmother did not understand.

“Because when he spoke, he looked the other way and it was confusing who he was talking to.”

“He’s just squint-eyed,” said Grandmother.

“Totally awesome! I would like to have it too!”

“How can you say that?” asked Grandmother, horrified. “This is not what anyone would wish on himself!”

Maxim did not want to argue with her. He thought enviously that it could be very practical – at school, you could copy everything from the classmate during an examination and read from a book under the desk. The salesman had surely done so in his childhood. Maxim liked him even more.

Grandmother suggested going for a walk, but Maxim wanted to go home as quickly as possible to play with his new toy. Although she was offended a bit, grandmother kissed him in good cheer and put him on the bus to go home.

When Maxim entered his room and put the gift on the table, he heard a dull voice from the box, “It is not very polite to put friends on their heads.”



“Ledvedik,” the bear introduced itself to Maxim, emerging out of the box. “My name is Ledvedik.”

In this way, his prevision confirmed, Maxim got a newcomer named Ledvedik. The name was as nonpareil as Ledvedik himself, all the same it sounded very dear. Did it not?

Chapter 3

About who Ledvedik really was

When the salesman said that the funny bear could do anything, he did not exaggerate – Ledvedik could walk, talk, even read, and count. And while he walked a bit clumsily and awkwardly, spoke with a croaky voice and a comic accent, he read as well as Maxim and solved mathematical quizzes more quickly and more precisely, getting the same results as in the textbook.

“It is so good that I have chosen you,” said Maxim, when Ledvedik had also repaired his remote-controlled car.

“You? Me? Have chosen?” Ledvedik asked astonished. “It was I who winked at you, to attract your attention. You had walked by me and hadn’t even noticed me. But I watched you and saw that you were the right one.”

Maxim looked at Ledvedik, perplexed.

"I've been hiding behind the plush lion for half a year since I did not want just anybody to buy me," continued Ledvedik.

"This is the first time I hear that toys themselves can choose their owners."

"Do you think I am a toy made for the enjoyment of children?" Ledvedik asked, offended.

"Excuse me, but I thought that a toy shop sells toys," Maxim began to justify himself.

"Did not you pay attention to the shop-owner when he spoke of magic? Even he had begun to suspect something, and you know how little adults understand about it. "

"Does it mean you are a magician?" Maxim asked, his voice trembling with excitement.

"No, not really. And, more precisely, not at all. But don't worry. I might have to prepare you for my story, though I don't know how to do it best."

"Ledvedik, please tell me, otherwise I will die from anticipation," and, when he saw Ledvedik still hesitating, he added, "Imagine, you've prepared me. You see, I am ready to hear the most improbable things."

"Then listen," Ledvedik began. "I come not from this world."

"I understand," Maxim nodded knowingly. "You are an alien and came from the universe."

"Almost correct," Ledvedik replied, "but I see that you are not surprised in the least. I thought that might come as a shock to you. I have been told that I should be cautious in revealing my secret."



“I was not shocked because my father is a specialist in the field of contacts with extraterrestrial civilizations,” Maxim said with a tinge of embarrassment to justify the absence of shock. “In fact, he is searching for other intelligent beings.”

“And how many has he found so far?” Ledvedik was interested to know.

“None. Nobody has succeeded as of yet. At last it has happened. I should tell Dad about it right away. I believe that his colleagues will rush over here as soon as they find out.”

“He has employees?” Ledvedik wondered. “And how many?”

“Twenty or so.”

“And what do they do all day long, if no alien has appeared?”

“Well...” Maxim realized he knew little about that. “They’re trying to make contact. Shall I call Dad now?”

“Just a moment,” Ledvedik held him back. “Say what will they do here?”

“I believe they will question you about everything and then take pictures for the press, so that the whole world will come to know about you. You’ll see that for yourself.”

“Please, don’t do it,” begged Ledvedik. “Firstly, I know too little, secondly, I promised to stay here without publicity, and, thirdly, these twenty colleagues could spoil all the fun. You know, these adults...”

Maxim sighed with disappointment. He understood Ledvedik’s concern, all the same he found it a pity that his Dad would not know anything about him. For twelve years, Dad had waited patiently for this moment. Mom was saying that if no extraterrestrial being existed in the entire universe, even a tiny one and not even civilized, that would be the end for Dad’s dreams. And Ledvedik was civilized enough as far as Maxim was concerned – he could calculate, read, and solve mathematics on the third-grade level!

Maxim tried to persuade Ledvedik again but he wouldn’t budge.

“I am an inappropriate object of investigation for your Dad,” Ledvedik added.

“Why?” Maxim asked, worried. “Do you think you are not civilized enough?”

“Don’t worry about that,” Ledvedik said coldly. “I mean something else. You said your father would be interested in extraterrestrial beings.”

“Of course, extraterrestrial.”

“I am not an extraterrestrial one, since I’ve not come to you from the universe.”

“Where from, then?”



“From here, from Earth.”

Maxim was taken aback.

“Yes, yes,” Ledvedik nodded his head, “we live on Earth right next to you.”

“Right next to us? Why don’t we see you then?”

“Because we live in another dimension.”

“Now, I don’t understand a thing. Where do you live?”

“I’m telling you, in another dimension, more simply, in a parallel world. Imagine, for example, a snail...”

Maxim closed his eyes and said, “Fine, I am imagining a snail.”

“Ok, she creeps unsuspecting and unaware in the meadow and does not even know anything about your existence. It is just the same about us – we live side by side yet do not notice each other. More precisely, you don’t notice us, whereas we have long since discovered your world.”

Maxim found the comparison with the snail rather insulting.

“And how have we been discovered?”

“This was an achievement of the well-known scientist, Dreistein. Like your father, he had tried to find extraterrestrial creatures at first but had no success for about a hundred years. Then he realized that he had not looked where he should have, and spent hundred and twenty years more searching in another direction.”

“Do you live so long?” wondered Maxim.

“More than two thousand years and the more we think, the longer we live.”

“Oh, is that how it is? My Great-grandma says that thinking shortens life and causes wrinkles.”

“I do not know what wrinkles are about; regardless, thinking certainly extends life. One of our scientists has been thinking about a GRANDIOSE PROBLEM for three thousand years. He says that nothing gives more vitality than thinking.”

Maxim decided that instead of the morning gymnastics, which he was not doing anyway, he would think for about fifteen minutes every morning. Well, maybe, not fifteen but ten for sure.

Then he asked, "And what did he invent?"

"Who?"

"Dreistein!"

"He discovered parallel worlds. They exist alongside your world albeit in other dimensions."

Maxim tried to make sense of that, however got no further than the comparison with the snail.

"Getting into another world is not easy," continued Ledvedik. "This could be done with the help of special transitions or crossings. And, of course, one has to learn how to use them."

"Sure," Maxim interrupted him. "We also have crossings. And we learn how to use them as well. Everyone knows that one should not cross the road on a red light, only on a green one."

"This comparison is quite good, although our transitions are more complicated. And for those who are interested, we have courses where you can learn the rules of the transition."

"Did you take such a course?"

"Yes, how else I would have reached the right place, namely, the toy shop? And now excuse me, I'd like to think a bit."

"What about?"

"What about? Well, just think. We have an hour, from eleven to noon, allocated for thinking." Ledvedik looked at the clock, "See, it is time."

Ledvedik became completely absorbed by his thinking and Maxim decided to leave the room not to disturb him.



That morning, Dad was at home. He was preparing for the night shift. The specialists in the field of extraterrestrial life did not want to miss a possible signal and therefore were working shifts to have somebody present by the receiver all the time.

Mom did not like Dad's night shifts, because on those days he slept until noon and she had to manage the chores herself. Her argument was that everyone has to sleep at night, and the "extraterrainials" would not be an exception. Dad rebuffed this criticism, saying they were not called extraterrainials but extraterrestrials, and that Mom did not understand the laws of how days and nights changed, that when the night reigns here, the sun could be in the zenith on other planets. And, anyway, instead of supporting him, Mom drives him out of his mind. At that point, Maxim was usually sent to his room, and would miss the most interesting part of the conversation.

This morning Mom was not at home and no one was disturbing Dad while he was working at his favorite place – the kitchen table.

Maxim made a sandwich. He wanted to split it in the middle, but one half came out bigger than the other. He ate the smaller one and put the larger one on the table next to Dad, who, of course, had completely forgotten to have breakfast. Dad put his pen down and looked at his son gratefully.

Having Dad's attention, Maxim asked if it was true that there were other worlds besides ours and whether there were intelligent beings out there.

"You mean the parallel worlds," said Dad. "One might assume that, although this idea has not yet been theoretically proved."

"Ha, theoretically! A scientist named Dreistein has already confirmed this in practice!" Maxim replied, and went to his room.

Dad took the sandwich thoughtfully and munched it absent-mindedly. Then he suddenly threw all the pages he had worked on throughout the morning into the waste-paper basket, snatched the pen and began to write down something. He was so enraptured by a new idea that he did not noticed that he was writing on a sheet of cut pattern for Mom's new dress.

Chapter 4

In which Maxim gets into an unpleasant situation but still holds his word

The last week before the start of school is a nightmare for every boy, because it suddenly turns out that the schoolbag is too worn out, the pens have dried up, and one has grown out of last year's clothes.

In the case of Maxim's family, it was even worse, because Sasha became a university student and both of them needed clothing "with a new look" (as Great-granny said). A shopping trip was always an enormous joy for the women and a real torment for the men.

The poor guys were dragged into all kinds of shops and forced to try on endless number of shirts, pants, jackets and everything else the women thought to be necessary until they all would approve of every minutiae detail of each piece, not just the size and fit but color, fabric, and even brand.

That left Maxim with almost no time to spend alone with Ledvedik. Sometimes Maxim went to bed later, just to play checkers with him. Ledvedik quickly understood the principle of the game and won almost every time. Still Maxim avenged defeats if they played at give-away, because Ledvedik could not accept the rules of the game and couldn't sacrifice pieces and lose even if it was called to win.

All unpleasant things, however, have a pleasant side – at some point, they end. After the shopping, the whole family gathered for Sunday lunch. At the table, as if they had a birthday, Sasha and Maxim sat in their new suits, shirts, shoes, and even socks. Sasha also had a tie on, which was obviously a torture for him.

“No, I can't anymore,” Maxim said after eating the fourth piece of cake.

“I can't anymore, too,” Sasha agreed, stuffing the tie in the side pocket.

“Here you get your gratitude,” wondered Grandma. “He wrinkles up the brand-new tie like a cleaning rag.”

“All children are ungrateful,” Great-grandma countered and looked at Grandma, which was awkward for her.

“Yes really, ungrateful,” Mom joined the conversation and looked at her son, yet Maxim did not feel embarrassed because he did not feel guilty.



“It is a normal conflict between parents and children,” said Dad in a conciliatory tone. “Listen, I think we’ve tormented the two gentlemen enough. They are suffocating in their suits. Let them put on their favorite jeans and T-shirts.”

However, the women were not ready to end the fun. First, Maxim and Sasha, according to the desire of the women, were to present their new clothes like real models on a catwalk show. The women agreed that the outfits were perfect. Even Great-grandma, the great fashion expert, praised it highly. Maxim was ready to run to his room to get out of his new clothes, when Grandma stopped him on the doorstep.

“My sweetheart, after the dessert one should entertain the guests a little.”

Maxim reluctantly dragged himself to the piano to play a new etude, but Grandma said she did not mean that.

“There is something more exciting than your new opus (she had the habit of choosing incomprehensible words for the simplest things in the world),” she winked at Maxim meaningfully. “Please, bring here your teddy bear, this computer wonder. Surprise us and let us enjoy the tricks the salesman has promised.”

“Obviously, it does not work,” replied Mom. “It’s really a pity,” she added.

“This is how it works!” Maxim resented the fact that she doubted Ledvedik. “He can reckon, speak, and even play checkers!”

“Introduce it to us, please,” Great-grandma was visibly enthusiastic. “I love computers. They are so cute.”

Maxim was keen to introduce Ledvedik to the members of his family because his friend was so intelligent and talented! But he remembered his promise to not tell anyone who Ledvedik really was and where he came from, and responded quickly, “As a matter of fact, he does not work today.”

“Does he have his day off?” asked Sasha.

“The batteries are empty,” Maxim quickly invented an excuse.

“I knew that a toy from the unsold stock was handed off to us. Even the batteries have already discharged,” said Grandma disappointed. “It’s your fault, Maxim. You wanted it so badly.”

“But you’re not a little girl anymore,” Great-grandma responded to Grandma, putting herself on Maxim’s side. “After all, I have taught you to check the goods and the change at the cash register. This is a mystery to me. My daughter gives her company profits in millions, she is simply unbeatable as a manager. The competitors faint when she enters the conference room. Despite that she can be deceived by a toy store salesman.”

"I assumed the salesman was a person who professionally advises customers at the time of purchase," Grandma defended herself.

"That was just the case with the last summer sale when one sleeve of a sweater was 10 centimeters longer than the other!" tittered Sasha.

Mom kicked him under the table.

"Maxim," Dad broke his silence, "in the instruction manual it is written that the toy also works with electricity from a plug."

"Yes, right, he has a plug at the tail end," remembered Grandma.

Sweat drops formed on Maxim's forehead, because he did not know how to free himself from this tricky situation.

"Yes, it could..." Maxim began rather slowly, "but we have no... how better to say it..."

"What is it we don't have?" interrupted him Grandma. "There's a socket next to the piano."

"... A transformer. This is a device for increasing the voltage," explained Maxim for the ladies.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Sasha burst out laughing. "You have perhaps forgotten to buy a small nuclear power station for this bear?"

The disgrace seemed to be complete.

"I think you're late for the movies," Mom looked at Sasha emphatically.



“For the movies?” Maxim was glad that the subject of the conversation finally changed. “Ha! Ha! Ha! It’s called “movies” nowadays, although this is a date – with his new girlfriend!”

Maxim had betrayed what he should not have.

“Maxim, aren’t you ashamed?” said Dad.

And Maxim was really ashamed now; he could not even look in anybody’s eyes. Now, the disgrace was complete.

In a way Maxim spoiled the lunch, but he managed to keep his word: Ledvedik’s secret remained a secret.

Chapter 5

About poetry and buckwheat Current

Maxim was tired when his first week at school was over. It was new and interesting there, though after two months of school break, it was difficult to concentrate on his studies. He decided he needs more sleep on the weekend and therefore he finished his homework on Friday and even cleaned up his room.

But early in the morning he was rudely awakened by a loud marching music. Maxim slowly opened his eyes to find Ledvedik busying himself with the radio knobs. The marching music was followed by the weather forecast, and then an interview with an exchange expert, who assessed the current market situation. Maxim understood barely anything of the story filled with technical terms – it was something

about Fitor, Libor and about a hostile and violent Crash – and drifted off to sleep again. He dreamed about two heroes named Fitor and Libor, who bravely fought against the violent Crash.

Suddenly someone shook him by the shoulder and Maxim jumped up frightened and out of breath, as he thought that the hostile Crash had attacked him. But instead of the Crash, Ledvedik stood before him, his eyes sparkling like two small flashlights and the end of his tail trembled with excitement.

“Did you hear what IT said?” Ledvedik’s voice was very high from exhilaration.

“Who? Said what?” Maxim mumbled not yet fully awake.

“IT!” Ledvedik pointed at the radio.

“Something about the stock exchange,” Maxim yawned.

“No, not the stock exchange, after that!”

“After that I fell asleep.”

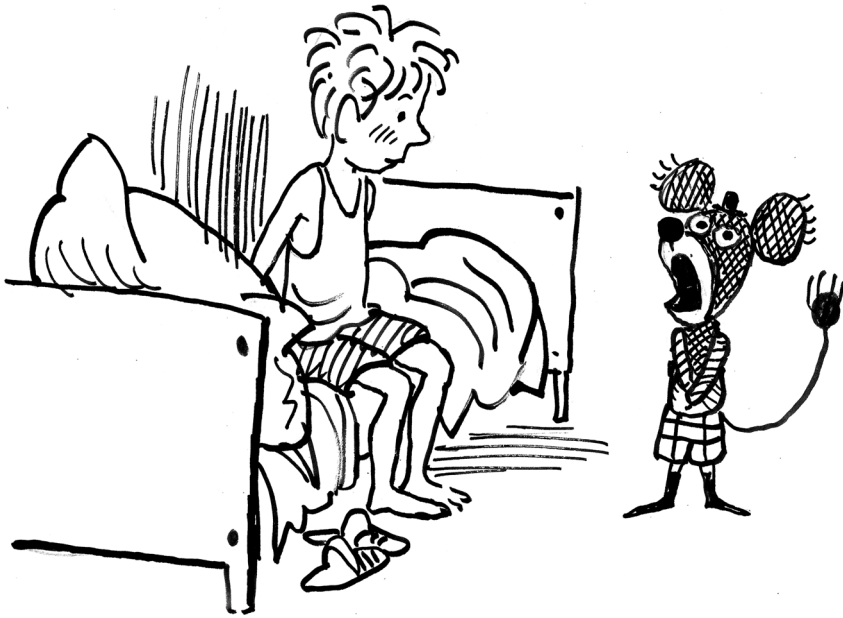
“How could you fall asleep when IT sounded?”

“What are you talking about?” Maxim was beginning to feel annoyed that he was being woken up for no good reason and was about to pull the blanket over his head and drift back to sleep. But Ledvedik began to drag him off the bed. Realizing he would not be able to go back to sleep, Maxim sat up.

“Tell me what happened that is so important,” he told Ledvedik. “What was it they said on the radio?”

“I do not know what it is, but I’ve noticed it. Listen!”

Ledvedik stood in the middle of the room, crossed his arms on his belly, and said the following poem as solemnly as he could with his croaking voice, wagging his tail with the rhythm:



I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For, so swiftly it flew, the sight
Could not follow it in its flight.

I breathed a song into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For who has sight so keen and strong,
That it can follow the flight of song?

Long, long afterward, in an oak
I found the arrow, still unbroke;
And the song, from beginning to end,
I found again in the heart of a friend.*

.....
* Poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Ledvedik sat down exhausted in a chair and the glow in his eyes went out. Maxim, astonished, was looking at his friend not being able to understand what was so extraordinary about that.

“Well, what is this?” asked Ledvedik.

“This is quite a regular poem,” explained Maxim.

“How can you use the expression “quite regular”?” asked Ledvedik resentfully. “All the fuses nearly burned out in my head.”

Maxim moistened his finger and touched Ledvedik’s forehead, just as Mom always checked whether the iron was hot enough, and his head hissed like the iron.

Maxim got frightened for his friend. He turned on the fan and put Ledvedik in front of it to cool his head. When Ledvedik cooled down, he explained that in his world no one ever heard of poems, let alone poetry. They are not even capable of inventing rhymes.

“Who could think that a civilization that has such a low technical level has such a spiritual treasure,” Ledvedik said, touching his head. “Well, it’s cooled down!”

Maxim was offended by Ledvedik’s remarks and tried to prove him wrong. Maxim was certain that his civilization was technologically advanced – after all, there were airplanes, televisions, and computers.

“Recently, my Grandma bought a robot that can wash, clean, cook and even knit. She says it is a true technological miracle.”



“Oh, that heap of scrap is worthless in comparison with your poems,” Ledvedik interrupted him impatiently. “How is it possible to compress the information in such a way! A firework of philosophy and emotions!”

Maxim was not quite clear what it meant – to compress information.

“This means to make the information compact or to squeeze it together.”

“Oh, you sound just like my Grandma. She also uses such incomprehensible words. What you have heard on the radio is called poetry. My Dad says poetry means fiction and therefore it’s a nonentity. Dad once said that poets must be very lazy fellows. They produce at most one mediocre book of poetry a year. I agree with him. Although my Mom says that poetry lifts us out of ourselves and our lives, while simultaneously connecting us to ourselves and our lives. I don’t know what it means exactly, but she likes such stuff. She even tried to teach me to write poems. It did not work very well, though.”

This fact astonished Ledvedik. He looked at Maxim as if he was some kind of a hero, and Maxim promised to teach him poetry.

“I think my mother even has a book, *Initial Course of Poetry*,” he suddenly remembered and went to look for it.

Ledvedik studied the book for about an hour and said that he had not understood everything, since his vocabulary was still very limited.

“I have a translation device in my head,” he told Maxim, tapping his forehead, “but as it turns out, there are considerable gaps in it. And so I would like to increase my educational level before I begin to write poetry.”

Maxim asked Dad to select the necessary literature.

“In the field of science, culture, and technology,” explained Maxim.

Dad wondered what it would be used for but when he heard that it should serve to broaden education of his son, he was pleased and piled up a bunch of thick encyclopedias and dictionaries on the table. And now Maxim had to help Ledvedik to increase his vocabulary. They began with a dictionary that was, at first sight quite thin, but after three hours of uninterrupted reading (Maxim had to read since Ledvedik wanted to raise his level of education as well) they reached the middle of the letter “B” only.

Maxim was tired after all that reading and he was very hungry, so he ran into the kitchen to make tea and grab a few sandwiches. Mom added various cookies. With a plate full of food, he returned to his room where he shared it with Ledvedik. As it is expected from a host, Maxim offered Ledvedik the best pieces. When he finished eating the last cookie, Ledvedik confided: “Honestly, your food does not taste good to me.”

“What do you mean?” Maxim almost jumped in surprise. “Why have you devoured eleven cookies only to tell me you don’t like them?”

“You wined and dined me so nicely that I couldn’t disappoint you. Besides, I did not know you were counting the cookies.”

Maxim felt a little embarrassed because of his lack of tact, and, to change the conversation, he asked what food Ledvedik preferred.

“Electric current,” he said.

“220 volts?” Maxim was speechless.

“The adults can digest a bit more while excessive voltage is harmful for children. Once I got about two thousand volts, so all electrical appliances turned on automatically when I was nearby. And I felt so miserable... My dear mommy, how concerned she had been about me after that.” His eyes filled with tears as he remembered how anxious his mother had been, “I had such a black-out that I could not even solve a simple differential equation or take a logarithm.”

“What could not you solve or take?” Maxim could not stop marveling.

He put his hand on his forehead to check whether his head was overheated as well.

“These are mathematical operations,” said Ledvedik jauntily.

“Isn’t it something about higher mathematics all these “quations” and “loparithms”?” recalled Maxim.

“Higher mathematics? Ah what! Play-school level.”

Maxim’s head was spinning listening to Ledvedik’s story.

“And you say you feed on the electric current?”

“I’ve surprised you strongly enough,” Ledvedik was concerned about the anxious look in his friend’s eyes. “Of course, this is not very edible food for you humans.”

“To be precise, this is completely inedible food,” Maxim corrected him.

“What a pity. And that’s because you have not been made suitable for that. Just think carefully.”

And Ledvedik began to tell Maxim that every living thing needs energy and the sun is a huge source of it. Plants use this energy directly from the sun, which they process with the help of chlorophyll. This is what makes the leaves green. Animals, on

the other hand, cannot directly use the sun's energy, so they eat plants where energy is enriched and stored as in a battery, and then people take part of the energy, for example, in the form of milk that cows produce.

"Now you can see how long is the chain between the sun and man," said Ledvedik. "We do not graze cattle on the open meadows like you; we build electric power plants and drink the current which is not any less tasty for us than milk is for you. You must admit that our way is much more practical and creates fewer problems for housewives – they do not have to prepare meals and wash dishes."

Maxim accepted that it reduced work load, still he couldn't imagine that it actually tasted better.

"Does the current have any taste at all?" he asked incredulously.

"Yes, it does. Unfortunately, it does not always taste good. In the shop, it had a taste of coal, so I did not feel well at times."

"Say what you want, but it's much more pleasant to eat something delicious: homemade cakes or fresh berries I have when I come to Grandma's country house. I mean Dad's mother, who lives in the village," clarified Maxim.

"Just the same for us, too. I also often come to my Grandma to the village and when I visit her, she always offers me some of her specialties. If you only knew what pleasant current her old mill produces! Not to compare with the modern nuclear power stations. The wind blows over the fields and absorbs the fragrance of flowers. I love buckwheat current the most. You can get it only when buckwheat blossoms. Then my Grandma always writes me a letter: "Come to me, my dear grandson, to taste the

buckwheat current.” And no matter how busy I am, I always find time to visit her for a few days.”



Maxim thought that buckwheat current perhaps tasted similar to buckwheat honey, which he particularly loved.

Ledvedik interrupted his thoughts and said in a dreamy mood, “I would not mind eating properly now. The meal that my

mother gave me before my trip is already consumed.” He pulled two batteries from his armpit.

Maxim had no idea how to help his friend, when Ledvedik came up with a solution for him.

“Show me, please, where the proper socket is. In the toy shop, I accidentally confused it with the radio socket, and afterwards I had a growling in my belly the whole day.”

Maxim pointed his finger at the socket next to the table and Ledvedik marched there quickly.