

Dina GUDYM
Excerpt from
Colon with a bracket

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Life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.
 O. Henry

Chapter 1

Finger misprints

We sigh, because there's nothing more accidental than love.

I was born as a result of an accident. Accidentally I was not kidnapped by gypsies in early childhood, accidentally not cast in a porn flick during school years, and accidentally found a job after college, because of the accident with the letter of application. I could have fallen in love with my neighbor or the twin owners of a nearby shop, but I have fallen in love with the author of a random letter, who accidentally had misspelled the address. And who accidentally wrote to me today that I am an unimportant madder and a seemingly useless intellectual corpse.

Surely enough, a file is not a paper – it can bear anything, but I had to read it three times before I finally realized that I hadn't been mistaken.

And I don't even know his name! Who does he think he is?

Maybe he is the one?

Uno, dos, tres!

Uno.

Un, deux, trois!

Go!

Now that I'm 26, I know that accidents can be of several kinds.

Pure – when on the news a commander explains the bombing of a Chechen village as an error of artillery estimates.

Unpremeditated – when Janet Jackson's breast pops out on stage or Mariah Carey's dress falls off.

Shocking – when a porn soundtrack is played over a broadcast from Vatican, and Italian, Spanish and South American Catholics are watching in awe how 20 cardinals produce orgasmic noises during the holy rituals. Several times, though, «Oh, my God!!!» is heard.

Accidents can also be positive – when a Dutch student finds Einstein’s handwritten notes in a book borrowed from the library, or an American student accidentally invents a halogen lamp that works 50 times longer than an ordinary one.

There are politically incorrect ones – in case of «Our president, who laid an official visit to Japan» with corrupted political meaning.

And literary – when a typesetter counted the exclamation signs in «Long live, Napoleon!!!» as the Roman III, and the emperor assumed the throne under a new name. Or when Nepalese newspapers wrote «suspicious» instead of «auspicious», congratulating the king. Sometimes you can find a «femme» for rent instead of «ferme» for rent in a French textbook, or «lon geared pets» instead of «long eared pets» in a biology schoolbook. Or «Miriam Cooper» is written on the star for the creator of King-Kong on Hollywood’s Walk of Fame instead of «Merian Cooper». So, it’s not surprising, that one random letter changed my life.

Misprints have haunted me since Girl Scout times, when we played militant pseudo-patriotic games. The list on the administration office door said that boys would go to «Eaglet» camp, while girls would have to visit «Shit Lightening». The paper was quickly removed very soon, but the little patriot in me pricked up her ears. Right in time to notice, Commander-in-Chill slipped in a newspaper, troubles, that hung-over miners, Pugacheva and Kirkorov (*famous Russian singers*) harassed together in matrimony, a man of a bolide build, Mr. ***, who was no longer «Russian Drama Theatre reading playwright», miserable penisoners, and Gagarin, who managed to die in a comic shuttle.

When I grew up a bit, things got worse.

When we read Turgenev’s «Mumu» (*a love story between a mute servant and a dog that he had to drown due to the order from an evil master*) in literature class out loud, I only picked up bloats.

Friends were drinking awful «TALAS» wine from tetrapacks, when I found mariujana in Kastaneda’s writings.

For my 18-th birthday grandma gave me a cookbook with «spread bastard on bread before putting sausage on it» recipe, and daddy presented a sellphone.

Around that time I also got chart. Surely, I meant charm.

After college I started working as a sickretary.

«Rewrite carefully» said a handwritten note attached to a very important letter. I tired very hard and succeeded, except for the signature «You’re Irene». Next time it got even worse – «Best Retards, Irene».

Misprints haunted me in coffee shops and restaurants, where I tried to escape existential loneliness with handsome young men. They used to pay for my cuts of coffee, coke and cola or «Blub Curacao».

If I went to an institution I would find a sign about lynch time.

If I read a commercial in a newspaper I would definitely find «furniture for sail».

Books described Headless Horsemen chafing pretty senioritas, and magazines adored Paris Hilton’s booty.

Finally I made two conclusions. First – I see things other people don’t. Second – I’m different.

Since then I have often asked myself: «What are you?» I know that the answer lies in the mix of milliards of genes and three additional factors: my wishes, intensions and actions.

But if yesterday I only performed actions with one man, couldn't I make deeds with another one tomorrow? This is why I'm trying to understand myself – I need to know which direction to move tomorrow, swearing that yesterday's actions will never be repeated.

What if I'm abnormal? Not thin but not fat, standing still on a social escalator, I hate screaming children, I don't appreciate men and I'm a bad cook. Well, how do you know this isn't the checking gauge?

The formula is simple: wishes – intensions – actions. What are you?

Chapter 2

What I am

When people first meet me they think I'm a nice girl. Timid smile, open gaze, sound judgement. But that's just equivocal. Real me is double-faced-ordinary. Like everybody.

Double-faced is because I'm dating two guys. Lack of warm-heartedness from one of them and money from another are closely related problems in my view. I manage to solve them dexterously – in our love triangle I'm sort of split, so that my private life looks like a poker game: 2:2. My boyfriend thinks that due to the fact that what is left after division is one, the first two beats the second. He doesn't even know how close he is to the ultimate truth, because he's one of the two. I'm a common person, «just because you can't understand what you want» says Olya-lya-lya – my friend, who lives in London. I also have a brother in New York, a cousin in Moscow and a classmate in Israel.

I mention them proudly. Whenever they talk about me they say: «I have a friend / cousin / classmate in Kazakhstan. Don't you know where that is? It's a big country between Russia and China. No, people don't ride horses there any more, well, maybe occasionally. Yes, there's winter. But you won't find any bears on the streets. They all work in circus. No, it's not Siberia. It's just an Asian Thunder Bay».

That's an insider's joke. But by this point in the conversation they usually forget that the dialog started about me and go on discussing geography: «Yeah, I have been to Afghanistan. Is that close to Kazakhstan? Paulo Coelho visited your country? What had the Good Warrior forgotten there? I guess it's not the most Biblical place, huh?» Who would like to discuss me after Coelho? There will be a dialogue about the degree of hack-work in his writings and even a waiter would appear to have an opinion on the matter.

I'd better keep silent. Besides, I hate Coelho. But I hate silence more. It's ok if mom and boss are silent. But if there's no notice from boyfriends or I have to sit quietly for an hour and a half at a presentation of a new electric toothbrush with litmus covering that tests pH balance in my mouth from day to day – it freaks me out!

A year ago I was invited to work at an advertising agency. Now my job includes attending presentations, making up speeches and talking a lot from a third person's point of view: «A medium kazakhstani female consumer wants to be modern, mobile and attractive. In order to sell her the new anti-cellulite crème we have to show a beautiful woman's bottom full-screen and add a slogan: «Set the passion!»

Whenever I say such things, all the brainstormers become ecstatic. Creatiff! We want more!

Advertising gives its subordinates a bit painful and grievous soberness of mind, though typical for all more or less smart people, playing fools for big bucks. Here your perception of the world changes. Your fat friend is no more just an architect. She becomes an unpopular brand, men serve as consumers, and her looks transform into PR-actions. Last Saturday we went shopping together because I have the right attitude and experience in promoting unknown trademarks and she's got the initial monetary base.

On the way we started talking. «See, - I said, - you're fat. And love, baby, is a market. But if you are positioned smart, we can pretend that your fat is a bonus». In a shop with a «Slae» sign we bought couple of low-cut shirts that would definitely be appreciated by the audience – different Caucasian men.

At night we would test the product in the DaFreak Club. «Let those bellies with mustache drown in your décolleté. Your goal is to prove to the other guys that in addition to the boobs you got some brain. This is called «acquisition of new markets». Leave the regional positioning behind». My friend is astonished and looks at me with the eyes the size of a Petri cup each.

She's probably thinking that if she followed all the steps and told all the right things at the right times, her life would become good and proper.

To me it's too simple. A real lady should be accompanied by mystery – a black hole where salaries, shirts and hopes disappear for ever. Hence, from time to time my actions contradict with whatever I had told both of my boyfriends two days before. Point by point.

Chapter 3

My boyfriends

Boyfriend №1 has a perfect tan, a yacht and two houses and pays court to me with reserved generosity of a person used to economize. He's a foreigner. Every respected Almaty girl should have one, who looks like he has just got off the Eastern express. Mine is from the Northern region, supposedly, Finland.

Before I met him I saw North only on a compass. But now I believe that Southern people will never survive with as few vitamins as Northern people do. Same with the emotions. №1 is lucky he has a partner. Otherwise he would die trying to deal with my expressiveness. This way he thinks that I'm a strong-willed person, a good friend and not a jealous partner. Swimming in this huge, as the Gulf of Finland, bay of delusions he's obviously planning to make a certain proposal. When I speculate in his manner, Christmas Eve certainly seems like the perfect time.

He attracted me in the beginning because he was nice and because before him I had sex with declassified font designer who, from time to time, could not afford condoms. №1 is not bad and tries not to offend me, but most of times it's obvious that I'm smarter.

Friday, dinner:

Me: I think our relationship has no future.

Sunday, coffee brake:

Me: Our relationship is progressing too fast.

- Oh, I see, - he answers carefully, - Honey, my middle name is Antony. Do you have a middle name?

- No. Just a second last name.

I'm such a joker, I have already been married. But №1 is a real man, and now, when he's 34, he's still afraid of responsibility. Once he confessed that on Christmas Eve he always makes one wish – to stay single for another year. But this time it's different and he feels that we perfectly suit each other, so he's almost deaf to what I'm saying. If things proceed this way we'll have children and then grandchildren, who will one day come to me and ask what love is and I will have nothing to say except that it's a market.

Boyfriend №2.

I'm no psychiatrist, but I think it's serious. I have a huge crush on №2, crazy in love. And he's a champion in changing moods with extra high speed. In addition, he loves to spread panics.

- Keep the distance, - he tells me. - That's what Hegel's first law of the bachelor says. Follow it, as I do, and we'll be fine.

- Liar! Hegel could not write about bachelors. You said it because no one ever read Hegel to the end.

- Cuz it's impossible to read more than one page.

- I know, you read the first one, but he denied this view later in the writing.

- I read it in the end.

- Maybe it was his first work, and all the rest 60 years he was ashamed of it and hid it.

- Get out!

I can only fall in love with a man who can score a point against me – that is, with confident young cynical guys. I can see them from a huge distance, because they represent the heroes of my childhood dreams. Mom says I'm not a girl, not yet a woman. I guess, I'm a man. Just playing.

To tell you the truth, I don't know why I like him so much. Jim Morrison's friends once tried to explain his success: «It's not the rhymes. I'm telling you, not the rhymes. He had a huge dick». Maybe, this is the reason?

Fortunately, my love changed its shape. If I were different, I would be dragging behind №2 like a broken train enjoying my Anna Karenina style torture. But I'm a Tatar girl, and we have strong sense of reality, so as time goes by, we get bored with the romantic genre like horses in Westerns.

Chapter 4

Bigamy

It's six in the morning. №2 is peacefully sleeping in my bed, shifting my marriage one day further. He's the kind of a guy who «would-never-what-so-ever-marry-anyone».

He's like the eternal Harry Potter. By the way, this type of men is very popular lately. But I'm worried that even my angelic patience will finish before he matures.

It's bright outside – full moon. I woke up because of the moon. Can't stand such nights. Anyway I'm lying calmly, not touching anything. I know that if I moved, №2 would wake up, and I don't want that. I want to think about what to do now.

Generally I'm satisfied. Except one thing. I mean two things.

I'm thinking whom I should spend Christmas with and what if I accidentally got pregnant. In addition, I suspect situation is getting serious – it was almost a miracle that they had not met several times recently. I feel like an air traffic controller – one wrong move and my boyfriends crash into each other like planes in...

I opened my eyes and looked around the room. I could see the remains of last night's party. №2 brought an old Polaroid and our photos are scattered all over the room.

He's keen on this stuff. There's a collection of home video accumulated in my laptop, most of which is porno trash that I'm afraid to even look at.

I'm lying and thinking – what if something like what happened to Paris Hilton, when her home video got to the Internet, happened to me? Her popularity only grew - world famous designers reacted quickly to the wave of universal interest and released t-shirts with Paris-Hilton-Moscow signs, while producers offered her to become a singer. With me it can turn the other way around. First of all, I'm not a celebrity, so any sexual scandal would turn into mere scabrousness. Like in a joke: «Your husband is not gay, he's just a fag».

Secondly, my Muslim family will not be able to overcome such a shame. Sexual revolution passed by them. Not like we do namaz five times a day or refuse to eat pork. Not at all. But we prefer to follow certain rules. That's convenient.

What I'm doing is breaking those rules, and even if everybody suspected me, they quietly got through to me that they respected my decisions and highly valued my maturity.

This is why I'm thinking I should put an end to this double dating practice.

After all, men are not the most important things in life. I have me. In the beginning of the year I promised myself to learn French and piano, start drinking freshes and start a business.

Since then dialogs like: «Is she Amankulov's lover?» – «No, Tatishev's» became stranger than foreign language; I have not bought a piano; juices enter my ration from time to time, when I'm not too lazy to wash million parts of my squeezer; and I can't make up an idea for my business. All niches are occupied – there are tons of boutiques and beauty salons, even Moschino shop is functioning well. The only thing I know about oil is that in the end we will all die, turn into it and the world will fight for us. There are as much as two stylists in town, and people know so little about fashion that I would never find a job here. The number of coffee shops exceeds the number of coffee lovers, because we are an Eastern country and (between us) prefer tea since ancient times.

Where else am I welcomed?

I started thinking about selling CDs with local celebrities' film tests or music videos kicked out of rotation long ago as compromising. Or, it's fashionable, become an owner of a contemporary art gallery; organize a prisoner's art exhibition or a personal one for a 5-year-old best friend's daughter, who loves to take pictures of buds with mommy's cell phone. I already got a name for that – a conceptual photo biennale

«World through the eyes of a five-year old». I promise it will be sold out – Almaty public understands contemporary art.

№2 woke up. Sober, hungry and unshaved. And advanced a psychological attack on me:

- Is breakfast ready?

- 10 minutes.

- Ok.

And shut his eyes. I couldn't leave it like that.

- What about exercise?

- No way. Sport quantizes your brain. That's too dull – one, two, three, four, fiiiiive, oh!

10 minutes later №2 quietly appeared in the kitchen and hugged me.

- This squeezer squeezed all my juices, - I said not even turning my head.

- It's good for you.

- Sure. Human kind is so crazy about goodness that we should start advertising disutility.

- Yeah! Like advertising chickens at the outbreak of the bird flue.

- I got several great ideas. For example, we show a fat husband, lying on a couch and lazily watching his wife cooking a dinner. And a sexy voice over: «How long has it been since you fried your chick?»

- Good!

- Next stage: a guy lost all his money gambling. He returns home sad. There he sees a plate with potatoes, vegetables and some free space in the middle. Slogan – «It's your chicken feed!».

- I want to show you something...

№2 threw his arms around me and our breakfast was over. That's his style – a bit crazy. But making love to him is astounding.

Chapter 5 ***BREAKING NEWS***

№2 left and I started getting ready for work, wagging my tail. Thinking at the same time how to discover if your man has magical hands. Definitely, using a two-sided duct tape. Several days ago I asked №1 to hang my photos on the wall, what he did, but attached mustache to them.

When I showed no surprise №1 said:

- If it's not funny you should take them off.

- I think according to Feng Shui it's good. I earn money, go shopping, I even bought myself flowers on Friday – don't I look like a man in a skirt?

- Could you tell me why your generation of women is trying so hard to simulate masculinity? Instead of existing in a common way like your mothers and grandmothers did you chose this new and fashionable way?

- It's because men start loosing their spirit, and we are just trying to fill in the gap.

- I think you are just trying to follow stupid Americans. It's a pity. All the modern day stupidity comes from the West, whereas in the old days all the wisdom came from the East. I fled to Asia because of women. There's something wrong with them. It seems

that they are over fed, deprived of make-up and fancy clothes, and only left with shorts and a bunch of idiotic ideas.

My American brother complained several times that all American men are waiting for the time when robot chicks will be produced, like in «A.I.». They want a girl always ready for sex, with no menstruations or PMS's, no headaches, no notion of «women's rights», «right of self-determination» and «freedom of female personality». The best case would be if she had absolute no notion of the fact that she is a woman.

He's telling scary stories about his colleagues who ask to call them Vaginal Americans and try to pee standing upright with the help of a special device called pee-mate.

I decided to call this movement emanpissation and even came up with a slogan – «Peace to women's piss!».

But it turns out that more and more men want to become normal again, without reading about bad consequences of female abuse in marriage lines like warnings on cigarette packs; or being afraid to tell their wives that they talk too much on the phone and not being sued. Hence they try to find wives in countries far from global trends. Just like mine.

So when I'm in a hurry early in the morning I'm still thinking about the requests in my mail box from the acquaintance site, where I placed my profile. It was a bet. Of course, they are electronic letters; the only source that I get real ones from is my cell phone operator Kcell.

Someone great said that all novels are letters written for a single person. I can only add that unfortunately not all the letters turn into romantic novels.

In addition, letters nowadays are processes, but not folded pieces of paper. We still keep them in the Inbox, but can't languish over them.

While I'm jumping around the room in a Gas t-shirt with «No comments» sign on it, trying to fit in really narrow jeans (Damn! Why do we have to wear such slim jeans to make men loose their breathe?) «Europe +» radio station bursted in on a song by «Sopli Vidoplyasova» (*really, a band named «Vopli Vidoplyasova», meaning «Mr. Vidoplyasov's scream». «Sopli» is buggars*) with breaking news. An energetic female voice jabbered: «UNESCO committee is worried about the fact that last Monday a group of unknown hackers had broke into and stolen a database of the major Runet acquaintance websites. Now at spammers' disposal there are photographs, profiles and intimate letters of the guests of such domains as mamba.ru, love.mail.ru, love.gay.ru, love.rambler.ru and many others. In the stream of incoming mail you can now find an offer to buy subscribers' list and find out «everything about the sins of the high and mighty», who, by the 2004-2005 estimates, make up more that 2 million people».

No wonder why UNESCO is worried – there was a turmoil even in our far-from-big-politics office yesterday.

- Finally, my dick will become popular among millions! – said our gay art-director Vladik.

- I was only discussing movies, - grieved corrector Sveta.

- Is alien sex still interesting to anyone? – designer Vadik was surprised.

- You too have profiles there? – Vladik was shocked.

- All respected people have profiles there, - I said.

- You, too??? – Vladik stared at me in awe.

- Well, yes.

I explained why I had put it there.

Secondly, because everybody expects me to marry well. Firstly, because I don't want to marry №1, and he's a great choice. I would marry №2, but he, in addition to being hopeless, is against it. Thirdly, my best friend Alina and I had a bet that starting a true romance in Internet is not realistic.

In addition, I work 24/7, and because I have a laptop and free net access in the evenings I carefully, like a good mother, take my laptop from kindergarten home.

So this profile contained correspondence with my virtual fiancés. They all were humanistic American millionaires, who would pay thousands of bucks for memberships at the best ex-soviet fiancées domains. I posted a photo shoot by a friendly photographer, made according to the strict demands of modern conceptual art – near the brick wall and under the bridge. It could not leave any fighter for democracy and against poverty in the third world countries indifferent.

Kazakhstanians are lucky these pictures were not sent to Pentagon. On the other hand, poor users from around the world are now lucky to enjoy this view for just 0,19 cents. This is what I call inflation!

Chapter 6 **Dream city**

I live like on a postcard – windows of my apartment in a 16-stored building look at the New Square, a bit further one can see President's Residence, Koktube (*a sightseeing terrace in the hills around Almaty*) on the left and Ankara hotel on the right. This description was given by №2 when he walked me home for the first time after someone's birthday party, where everybody got so drunk that forgot whom to kiss and which direction to go.

Any film director can confirm that Almaty night lights can become perfect scenery for starting a love story. Although my story with №1 was already at its peak, it's not surprising that after such a phrase I launched a second story line.

In the end, you know you can't be monogamous in Almaty.

If you want permanency, it means you are a newcomer. I guess I have to change residence to get married. Start living a well-ordered life and reasonably resign myself to the necessity of a mat. I mean, a man. Only one. In my case – the second one.

Anyone who has already been married knows that it's viral. I mean, vital. Otherwise society starts looking at you like you had forgotten to do something important. For example, flush the toilet. But marriage is a religion. Either you believe in it and it becomes crucial for your life, or you don't - and then it's just the state of mind.

I'm thinking about it on the way to work down Mira Street until Tashkentskaya, being stuck in numerous traffic jams at 9-30 in the morning. During this time I became 300 meters lower compared to the sea level. In the evening I become same 300 meters higher.

People not used to such air pressure drops can have their ears blocked. To me, like to all Almaty dwellers, it's common and I don't even realize that after a year at this work I might have conquered an eight-thousand-meters-high mountain.

I live in the middle of so-called «Golden Square», behind which borders another city lies.

Outside it's a simple and hard-working as a housekeeper, Almaty. Inside – it's pretentious and haughty like my friends' mothers. It may sound strange, but most

really bright and outstanding people here are slackers and pioneers, who come from the outer circle. By the middle of their lives they move to the center to rest and reap laurels. With me it works the other way around – I was born and raised in the center, but work far down town. I separate the city by Up and Down, like sellers in the men's apparel.

Almaty is the city where nobody is in hurry and everybody (even the sellers) is waiting for something, like they are in a fancy waiting room in the world's train station – beautiful mountain view, cheap taxis and tasty cognac.

For example, I'm waiting for true love; my friends are waiting when the long promised Beatles statue will be placed in the 28 Panfilovs' Park (*the name of the park was chosen to commemorate the 28 kazakhstani soldiers of the Panfilov's division, who during the Second World War died defending Moscow*). My friends are not very much keen on music, but highly respect Stella McCartney shoes and bring unique samples from London.

It's surprising that having accomplished something and left the country, all Almaty people sooner or later come back, because, believe it or not, this 1.5-millioned sleepy lazy boy with Chimbulak (*a ski resort in the mountains around Almaty*) at the head and Kapchagay (*an artificial lake north of Almaty*) at the feet is our lovely city.

It's not surprising that this awesome and unbelievable story started here. You would say it started from the end. Your end, by the way.

Chapter 7 An attachment

After 300 years of intensive training I might learn to cook. Breakfast got burnt, the juice is trite and time is running away. Hence, I have to visit my fridge and be content with a Danone bottle, chilling there in loneliness. I'm drinking it and reading stickers on the fridge door.

I write notes because my memory and I are imperfect. We both forget the simplest things. So, my fridge is decorated with colorful notes:

«Repair the apartment»

«Make a dinner»

«Water the flowers»

«Get married and have children»

This format teaches you laconic brevity – it's crucial for survival. Especially for a copywriter's survival.

But our job actually demands the ability to put anything into several words.

Preferably, into three words.

Three key words. What are they?

I don't know.

No, these are not the words. Really, I don't know.

Some people learn traffic laws and French with the help of the stickers. Others collect girlfriends' phone numbers in alphabetical order. Speaking of me, I write my own

quotes. It's very important – they are quite weird and if I don't record them, I would never remember later.

For example, an observation: «What a nonsense – a good commercial! In order to become effective a commercial has to be bad».

Or this one – «Cooks don't make this world better» (could fit into McDonald's advertisement, convenience foods and our office canteen).

I like phrases overloaded with meaning. You know, 25% more absolutely free.

Making up slogans is like making up crossword questions knowing the answers beforehand.

Our creative director said at the last brainstorming:

- Look how easy it is. Take any religion. What's the main point? An icon, an image and a prayer. These are three main inspiring elements that hold the concept together. What do we have? A cigarette pack and a picture of a girl with thin fingers, who is smoking extra slim cigarettes. So, we have an icon and an image. Our goal is to make a prayer – the slogan.

- Can you imagine that 2000 years ago several guys gathered on the top of the Mount Sinai and started brainstorming? The creative outcome was very effective – it still works.

- Zena, don't blaspheme.

Sometimes I go over the edge – whenever surrounded by men I struggle with their interest, my coquetry, a chance to say something smart and universal cynicism.

My name is Zena. To be more precise, Zemfira, but everybody calls me Zena for short. Even my mom started calling me Zena – she says I react to this name better.

I finished my drink, threw the bottle away and proceeded to the bathroom. Salinger's Glasses used to write soap notes on the mirror. 15 years ago I loved reading his novels.

«Love? Huh! Hatred has hundreds of such names» is written on my mirror with red lipstick.

I wrote it after a fight with №2 when he mentioned that my past is blast. To which I said that my blast is in the past.

Why do several letters always interfere with my happiness?

While packing my laptop I noticed a sticker on it: «File is not paper. It can bear anything».

In good old days paper, goose feathers and notion of calligraphy were highly valued. People would not talk in vain, moved by boredom and wrote only the most important things.

Computers changed the situation and nowadays we write truly monstrous commercials. And you know what? No problem. Everybody's happy.

Notes on my fridge appear more frequently than on the billboards. But moving around the city and seeing own quotes on the billboards makes me feel strange. Like I'm some kind of a great unrecognized writer.

Most of them appear on the crossroads. You know, billboards are aimed at drivers and passengers and are located where they can easily be read.

Billboards for pedestrians should be located higher and be bigger. The British took the farthest step – recently I saw on the news that they had set the biggest board in the world – of an English football club «Middlesborough» and world record in the billboard size at the same time.

Here in Kazakhstan the most popular billboard size is 3 x 6 meters. Sometimes instead of advertisement we can see «Hold on, people, summer is coming» and «Zhanara, will you marry me?» postcards there. I have never received anything like that. On the other hand I fabricate messages to the mankind every day.

Chapter 8 Our literature

After arriving at the office and turning my MAC on I found out that since yesterday I have received:

1. A letter from my American brother:

From: georgebush@mail.ru

To: per4ik@mail.ru

Hi!

You promised to answer tomorrow. I guess your tomorrow can last for ages like in some primitive cultures' beliefs. Obviously it means "any day after today".

I decided to answer. I have not done it frequently lately, you see. I want to find something cute and brotherly – a small rhyme or a little picture that would alleviate discomfort from a long silence. When I couldn't find anything suitable I decided to just answer.

From: per4ik@mail.ru

To: georgebush@mail.ru

Hi there!

Do you remember a guy who wanted to move to the US and become an athlete with a perfect bud))))). How's he doing?

2. Three love letters from the site. All of them – from lucky Middle Eastern engineers. After couple of months that my profile had been posted there I managed to gather a whole collection of such letters. The funniest moment comes when I pass them through the online-translator.

From: Eurosat General Trading Est <buabbas1@yahoo.com>

To: per4ik@mail.ru

Hi! i see you profile , and i like you , i want talk with you , i am kind , well education Busniss man , from Egypt, 30 yrs and i want invite you visit Egypt wait your reply
Saied

So many i's, it seems he had pinched certain body parts in a door.

From: hameedrazashaikh@yahoo.co.uk

To: per4ik@mail.ru

Hello darling

How are you my deer? It is my pleasure to write you this mail, to be a very nice & respected friendship for life with you. I am very keen to find you as friend, lover and sincere relations. I have very few friends but they are very gentle and sincere. Looking you a positive and nice response with your lovely picture. I will send you my picture on your request.

Wish to love & best regards

Hameed

Bisexual, most probably.

From: Yacoub@hotmail.com

To: per4ik@mail.ru

Dear

Am Yacoub from Kuwait, am 42 years old welling. To invite you to Kuwait for a month or more do You wish to come. Regards

Looks like if I removed my profile all the industrial activity in the Persian Gulf would stop.

3. One more astonishing commercial proposal. Obviously, some people mix litter bins with the mail boxes.

From: kznet@mail.kz

To: per4ik@mail.ru

Dear Kaznet users,

Two months ago our company has already ovvered to buy a new version of the on-line corrector of Cyrillic texts. Now we are sending you the trial version of this program with a duration limited to 40 days. In case you are not satisfied with the produtc's performance we offer you to buy it with the help of our banner network.

Waiting for you responses with Hope.

Great! Creative! This is what I call black PR. And some Hope is really lucky – she sent four misprints to me. Let me answer some crud.

From: per4ik@mail.ru

To: kznet@mail.kz

Without long prefake – highly value your intellectual lagor, but would you be so kind not to disturb the flow of my daily grind.

Best retards.

I used to have a spellchecker on my PC. But it would highlight everything due to its purposefulness and perseverance. If he were a real guy, intelligent and almost a poet I would never even talk to him. Because only an idiot with millions of complexes can be 100% sure that a proper sentence should not exceed 12 words, each of them not more than 8 letters long and don't even think about consonants at the turns – what if I try to over something, as it was offered by M., and accidentally dislocate my jaw? Last time, when my spellchecker only changed «terracotta» to «terraced» in the whole tender commercial text about lingerie, I turned it off and now I can only rely on my memory. And copying Lebanese national editorial that provides every book with «Perfect is only Allah», now I can only depend on His will.

On the way to the coffee machine I met our creative director Ivan:

- You look good, Zena.
- Your pink tie is very good.

This is the eye-stopper effect. Eye-stoppers in advertising are things that grab attention: manikins in the shop windows, huge toys, coke bottles, cars by casinos, barrels of beer by pubs, people dressed like cactuses by flower shops and even celebrities at the presentations.

- Your tee suits you well. I hope you remember that we are having a rehearsal of tomorrow's presentation at 2 p.m. I hope we'll be lucky not to get any comments afterwards. Otherwise be ready to spend the whole night with your t-shirt at the brainstorming.

I smiled like a fool – his tie grabbed my attention and I don't know what to say.

Translated from the Russian by Kate Dzyvonik