

# Dana's Birthdays

A life-long diary from a citizen of an experimental city

by Novak Kovačević



## A word from the author

Welcome to this peculiar project of mine that I've been working on since 2017, and that has been brewing inside my mind for at least a decade before that. It is 2023, and I still don't know how to categorise this book. Is it a diary if there is a narrator? Or is it an ecosocialist solarpunk novel? Could it be science fiction? If I'm allowed to, I'd label it as realistic fiction nowtopian diary, but I'm sure the traditionalists would laugh at me. But should we care about labels, really?

I do care about how you read this first book of mine, my dear reader. I would suggest reading it as you sip your tea – slowly and intentionally. If that analogy doesn't apply to you, I'm sorry, but that is how tea should be consumed. In all seriousness, this should be your secondary book that you read a couple of pages each day. A proper novel gets devoured quickly, but because of the restrictive format of this diary, it doesn't really work if you go through it quickly since every two pages are a year of Dana's life.

What this book definitely isn't is a prophecy of the future or my courageous attempt at being a futurist. In between the utopists and distopists, leftists and rightists, liberals and traditionalists, atheists and the religious, east and west, communists and capitalists, anarchists and lawyers, nature-lovers and technophiles... etc., who can dare to guess what is going to happen as we journey along on our elliptical orbit around our celestial fusion reactor?

I didn't want to explain in detail most ideas, but over time, I'll be adding these "footnotes" through my website for the corresponding chapters. I also didn't want to show off my *incredible* vocabulary, partly because I'm not a native speaker. Thus, the wordplay is more credible than incredible. In this way, the book is accessible to all levels and ages. With all that in mind, I believe you can summon the tolerance, consideration and patience while reading this, but most of all, deep, wild and detailed imagination because "The inability to imagine a world in which things are different is only evidence of a poor imagination, not of the impossibility of change".

In the first few chapters, I have chosen the format of the third person narrative to try to distance myself from the events and the main character so that you can have a more objective and broader

view of Dana's new world. Also, babies don't write diaries. But throughout your read, I'd love it if you would criticise, fantasise and daydream. To this end, I decided to create the [danasbirthdays.online](http://danasbirthdays.online) website, so this could become an international and interactive project for years to come. You can contribute with your related writing and drawing, or even ask me a question if you write a comment under this introduction chapter.

I am well aware that I could've made Dana more likeable, with a more dramatic plot, twists and turns, but I wanted her life to be as realistic as possible. I disagree with her on many occasions, but to me, she's just being human, doing our peculiar human things.

I'm almost done with excuses here; I'd just like to compare this first book of mine to the first demo album of your favourite band. After many other polished studio albums that come after it, the first raw demo is not any less valuable as it has its unique charm. Just as this is just the raw beginning of my journey to becoming a writer.

Dana's world is really possible today. The biggest obstacle to having it today is the lack of imagination and honesty, plus the untiring bad habits of people in power - mind you - they are not only the people in government but also people with money in their hands, bank cards and smartphones. Purchasing power does rule! There are many more of us that want you to know that you are the one that actually has the power. Do you have only a few bucks in your pocket? You still have some power because you can, as the saying goes, "vote with your dollar". I do understand it might be too difficult to imagine a world without money, but please don't stop reading. Cognitive dissonance is our common nemesis. In the end, I am positive that you can, to an extent, see what I see and use that perspective to keep going forwards throughout the easy and the difficult times.

Finally, I must express my gratitude to at least two very important people, without whom this project wouldn't even start. Thank you, Daria, for encouraging me to put all my ideas into a book and thank you, Aleks, for helping me with the actual writing; you two had believed in me as a budding writer when I didn't. A big thank you goes to all my other friends who helped me with their valuable feedback while I was getting the book ready. I hope that, perhaps this might also encourage you to try your hand at writing, dear reader.

## Chapter 0 - Dana's Birth-day

*It's warm and snug in here, cosy. Moving is difficult. I don't want to be anywhere else. A constant stream of life-giving energy flows into me, and I don't need to think about anything. I'm just expanding and experiencing this steady growth. I see purple everywhere, but sometimes all turn pink and blue. It should feel cold, yet it doesn't. It feels like the perfect place to be - it's my home. But how did I get here? Why? How long will this go on? Is there a purpose to this existence? Perhaps I should do something. Each day it's getting tighter, and I feel like the world is turning upside down on me. I'm claustrophobic and afraid. The dam will break and release the blood... I now know it's time for me to leave this home and meet the voices I heard over the past nine moons. I'm being pushed and then pulled outside...*

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Dana was born in a painful, bloody and miraculous mess we call childbirth on December 22nd, year 2000. Her parents listened to the doctor's decision to deliver the baby the natural way and didn't want to find out the gender. They were utterly delighted when they first set their bewildered eyes on her shiny and slightly purple body. Dad was, understandably, a bit more bewildered by the event he had just witnessed. After cutting off the cell-building cord, the little girl started breathing air for the first time. This new thin fluid felt abrasive as it entered her fresh lungs, but she felt stronger with every breath and every cry. Purple then gave way to pink to match her mothers' exhausted but smiling cheeks. The newfound lack of safety was somewhat frightening for the newborn. However, after being held in her mother's trembling embrace, Dana felt assured that things might work out just fine in this new world she swam out to. The feeling of belonging had replaced the helplessness.

They stayed in the hospital for a week to get checked out and monitored before being sent home. The name Dana was selected a few months ago, as both parents wanted a simple, ancient and forgotten name. Dana will like it when she grows up. She will also like the new experimental city named Isataion that her parents moved to a few months ago, right after they found out Mom is pregnan.

Even though they had just arrived here, they both still got parental leave from their workplaces. Dad got three years off, while Mom got five full years off in order for both of them to be fully present during Dana's first years on this planet. Nannies and grannies are no replacement for real parents. However, every citizen here has to do at least one hour a week of communal work. Mom will actually be looking forward to that from next year.

They both had to pass the parenting test when Mom knew she was pregnant. It was a crash-course, but failing the test was not an option, as she really wanted to keep Dana. Dad barely passed with the minimum baseline score. That was the closest call. Dad doesn't need to go to work so he can focus on parenting, but he still seems scared of Dana, at times even terrified. This disappoints Mom deeply, as she didn't expect that of "her perfect man".

Both Mom and Dad are thirty years old and were in dire need of a good, stable home. But instead of choosing something proven and steady, they chose to live in an alternative kind of community. Dad was pushing more for this, but both felt desperate as they didn't want to go back to their home countries to start raising a child. Last year, this place just got the opening crew of about fifteen thousand people, most of which were farmers, builders and teachers. Already, by this winter, the population has increased to fifty thousand.

Everything's still simple, raw, unfinished. Walking and bikes are the only options for getting around for the time being, but since this high-density city is less than three kilometres wide, that's not an issue even for the elderly. Everyone calls this place a "City-State" because outside of the heavily urbanized centre, there lies a rural Periphery which has a lot of space for expansion.

This place is completely off-grid, including water and energy needs, except the internet that's shared with Kazakhstan - the country that allowed the building of this city, close to the Russian border. The north coast of the Caspian Sea is twenty kilometres away, but nothing is being dumped into it. The obligation is to rejuvenate this Caspian Lowland ecosystem, which has been desertifying over the last few decades. The natives have been calling this whole area a desolate wasteland, but the steppe rehabilitation is already on the way, and the lease is for ninety-nine more years.

## Chapter 1 - 21 months old?

Touching everything with our mouth would be an interesting way for us all to live... imagine that. Experiencing all the smells and sounds is fascinating, but seeing the faces of the two most familiar voices is endlessly fascinating. Just as Dana's cells are growing, multiplying and evolving, so has the city grown with its Periphery. Dana is attempting to speak in the cutest language of all – International Baby Language, while growing her first teeth, asking for everything with crying, and eventually sleeping after being breastfed in her mother's embrace and in the baby sling.

Mom was taking her to all parts of the city at different times of the day and different seasons this year. One of her favourites was the roof of their building, riddled with fruit trees, berry bushes and vegetables flowering in spring, and fallen leaves of fall scattered over the glass floor in the centre of the roof, looking down into the building's staircase and elevators. She wondered where the golden-brown leaves ended up after being picked up and blown off by the wind over the roof's edge. She also wondered why Mom's heart beat much faster when they were up there.

Her other favourite place was the Pine Pagoda tower, by far the tallest building in the centre of the city - full of stores, workshops, classrooms, amphitheatres, hospitals, gymnasiums, dance/concert halls, and all the facilities the citizens need. Every twelve floors, there is an open floor with a twenty-meter-tall ceiling - a very wide gap in the building, with even more flora and fauna grown partly for food (plants only for food) but mainly for displaying different functional ecosystems. Artificial, low-energy lighting is installed on the innermost parts of these floors to simulate sunlight, especially during cloudy days. At night the tower looks like a sparkling micro world - of mega-size rising to the stars.

How and why all of this functioned was, of course, totally irrelevant to Dana, but as people were just walking around the narrow cobblestone paths, and sitting along the many bamboo benches, chatting, observing, meditating or having their lunch breaks, it all seemed to her that she and her fellow humans could easily coexist with other living and non-living creatures from these habitats. It takes

a few things to master that smoothly - calmness, wisdom, empathy, self-control and a gentle kind of altruism. The education system Dana will go through is based on these exact values.

It is no wonder Dana is smiling and laughing so often already. When she saw her first snow in the park between the buildings and the neighbour's pet pig was equally excited, trying to chew and eat it before jumping and rolling around in it. Then, just two weeks before her birthday, all the hair from her head, including tiny eyebrows, fell off suddenly. Unsurprisingly, Mom and Dad freaked out and consulted a doctor who consulted another doctor, and none of them had any idea why it happened. Paediatricians, dieticians, pedagogues and psychologists are always available on-demand - online and usually in person - and not just for the babies' needs. All parents are strongly dissuaded from using nannies in these first years unless necessary, when, for example, Mom gets totally fed up with everything.

Mom and Dad got all the fundamentals right in their relationship. They know themselves well and each other, they give each other space when needed, and they both listen and speak politely, but not at the same time, usually. Open, honest communication has always worked for them. Her truth is kind, but his is brutal. They're so delighted that this place seems like they understood and imagined it would be. Before coming here, they were working aboard cruise ships. They'd clash often, but that environment was the opposite of this one. They are not surprised by how well they function, except that Dad is so scared whenever left alone with Dana. Mom's slowly becoming chronically tired and needs some relief and time off.

Aside from the sudden hair loss, she was developing as predicted throughout her first year in the new world, except for laughing more often than other babies. Mom and Dad almost forget Dana's wailing when she giggles. All creatures she encountered seemed so happy to see her big brown eyes. In the beginning, it was challenging to focus those eyes, but during her year on this planet, she learnt how to use her itsy-bitsy fingers, crawl around and even prop herself up on her arms and sit without falling over (often). She better not forget how to deal with the falls because changes are coming and are inevitable. Autumn leaves are now gone and as autumn leaves, winter sweeps in chillingly with a new trip 'round the sun for Dana to experience.

## Chapter 2 - Toddler steps

The second year of Dana's life was an unending wave of attachment and separation anxiety, but overall, her development has been on point. Her speaking improves, and she toddles and climbs with some quick dashes. The brain's growing as well; as predicted, she's a fast learner, so her cognitive abilities are improving. Hair is back too. She's been becoming more social and in touch with all the new emotions swaying her from side to side. Fetching and sharing things is only for the "bestest" of friends. Now, at the end of the year, she has almost a dozen teeth to gnaw on everything and can barely dress and undress herself. Mom is slowly introducing solid foods, and Dad... well, he hasn't been so helpful, really. But there's progress; he's less scared of being alone with Dana because he can finally understand her communication.

Dad's been occasionally working (he can't help himself), as that's his only way of destressing. This makes their marriage turn a bit cold. But as Mom sometimes takes Dana to nurseries, she feels more grounded and free to do... stuff! Dad's been involved with a chemistry team as a mechanical engineer working on batteries since he had experience with the GM's deceased EV1 debacle. That's actually how he met Mom. He was so frustrated with everything he took up the first job that popped up in the ads, and it was on a cruise ship. Since he's somewhat of a workaholic, he kept renewing job contracts and seeing many ports across the globe.

According to him, the most beautiful thing he saw during those onboard years was - Mom next to a waterslide, taking photos of the rich and drunk tourists and their children. She didn't care about him until he pursued her diligently and stubbornly, as he does with everything he set his mind on. Thus, she gave in and found out that there are many exciting things about him which are not easily noticeable at first or even second and third glance. Most of all, she appreciated how simple and kind-hearted he is. Equally important, he seemed very loyal. Their unique spark of love started a steady, dependable flame that wasn't burning too brightly. After her many tragically failed relationships, he single-handedly restored her hope in men. Before the cruise ships, she was a nurse and, before that, a

marketing saleswoman. She did many art-related jobs in between while he climbed aboard in order to have a rest from his career, which he believes should revolve around one job. They've had arguments since about "jacks of all trades" and "masters", but it seems that opposites do attract. Or cancel out.

The city was attracting all kinds of people from different corners of the world looking for a fresh start or a second chance. The passport was irrelevant. Honesty was most sought after. Of course, lots of questions were asked, and answers required, but education level and the amount of work experience weren't that important either. The elderly and even people with disabilities were encouraged to migrate. Everyone can find something here to be useful at. The internet forum pioneers started the process many years ago, as they were eager to move. But with every passing year, more and more buildings and apartments are being completed. But to a bit lesser extent, the Periphery is being populated too. A hands-on lifestyle is required there, which most cannot follow. Naturally, no one is set or fixed anywhere, so transfers are even encouraged at times of need.

Another thing is - there's no money. Not in a destitute way, but not having a currency is a major part of this experimental community. This economic system, without banks, is even beyond the "universal basic income", as there's no income. Consequently, there's no out-come either - people don't buy anything. There is a credits system, which promotes and dissuades specific actions, habits and jobs. This can be used for getting luxury goods or experiences. People must have some incentive, but also restrictions - the perfect example is that almost all goods in the stores are limited, variable in value and amount, so one does not go every week and gets six kilograms of cupcakes and brownies for his small family. However, being a conscious and realistic consumer - can get one awarded some "brownie points" to spend on some... custom-made brownies.

A journalist visiting this summer wrote this in his conclusion: "Even though it still looks unfinished, everywhere you go, there's an odd contrast between the functional design, engineering and the seeming chaos of artsy randomness all around. It's like a clean-shaven man in a suit and tie but wearing a Hawaiian shirt, shorts and Japanese flip-flops. Riding a wonky step-through bicycle."

### Chapter 3 - Meeting father

As the city and its infrastructure is getting more sure-footed, along with the steady influx of people, water rationing is almost over. The numerous rainwater storage tanks are at capacity, and the average consumption per capita has been established. Naturally, that means there's always rationing, as people are "strongly discouraged" from using too much water. There's a weekly and daily measurement taken from every apartment. The Periphery houses don't have these sensors and data, as they are basically on their own and people there are already used to conservation.

The government is now a fully formed body of twelve experts on various subjects (agriculture, ecology, pedagogy, journalism, philosophy, psychology, sociology, engineering, medicine, law, arts and economy) who are shortlisted by public voting and then selected by the council themselves. Sortition is used as a representative sample of the population, so the census is done quarterly, as the new council members can apply and join anytime. These selected representatives are busy for a year, and then they're either up for one more year or they have to step down for five years maximum, after which they can apply for another term. Everyone is tracked and displayed on a fully transparent online forum platform (Kvorum), which is currently still behind schedule.

Dana, on the other hand, has been a bit ahead of her schedule. She's been fully weaned by this winter, has a set of twenty baby teeth, and runs and jumps around while building ten floors of blocks, one-time though. She learnt how to toilet and speak in full, albeit simple, sentences, but she doesn't want to make friends with other children at the neighbourhood nurseries. In the first half of the year, she did great teamwork, but not so much in the last couple of months. Perhaps it is because she's becoming aware of herself and her newfound selfishness, which brings her autonomy that she never had before, being attached to her parents - mostly Mom.

Parents have had their share of ups and downs this year. Love and hate relationship with resentment, forgiveness, door slams and massages. It all started on one cold, bleak morning in February when Mom finally decided to confront him in her carefully calculated

approach. Talking to a psychologist and a marriage counsellor sparked her motivation. She told him he needed to stop finding excuses and spend more alone time with Dana. Granted, he was spending more, even though he started working full time, but since Dana can talk, he should be more involved now, yet he still avoids her, and Mom barely gets any time for herself. If it weren't for nurseries downstairs, she'd go berserk! She still has two more years of parental leave, so she'd like to use some of it herself. Dad says that he never worked less in his life and that forty hours a week is child's play. He promised he'd help out more with actual child's play. It took a couple of months, but he stepped up, so much so that he surprised both Mom and Dana, making one cry from joy and the other from laughter on many occasions. He did try to show her his video games, but Mom found out and "grounded" him for a month. So now, no media for both of them. By parental guidelines, children aren't allowed to watch any media until they're at least age five.

The industry has been rising the fastest in the city, mostly recycling imported materials (glass, metals and plastics even) but repurposing and repairs are ubiquitous, especially in the electronics sector, most of it being imported "waste" to begin with. Many hard-working, resourceful people joined, with lots of experience (many without university degrees), that can help with production and overall efficiency better than most highly educated migrants. Some things are brand new and grown here, such as hemp, at the time being used chiefly for bioplastics. Used hybrid cars are imported too, but one by one are converted to full electric, as not many are needed throughout, about two hundred.

The majority of Isataion transport is handled by buses, a mismatch of shapes, brands and sizes, again, being slowly converted to EV. There are more buses than cars, as in order to use a car taxi, one needs to spend their LUX credits, while the buses are free. The lack of private ownership of vehicles didn't go down well with the Western immigrants; some are even complaining about not being allowed to own a bike. Shared bikes, which are docked in front of every building and of outstanding quality, seem not good enough for people used to using SUVs to go... everywhere. Meanwhile, Dad is finally reading bedtime stories.

Dana's Birthdays  
**Chapter 4 - Burns**

Everyone was looking forward to Dana speaking more and having conversations, yet parents are already almost regretting having that wish fulfilled. Kids grow up much faster than we expect them to; that's very easy to forget. Therefore, let's begin with a summary of the top three of Dana's ruthless burns of this year:

One very humid day in March, Dad told Dana for the tenth time not to run around with sharp objects around the house. Getting fed up with his repetitive reminders, she asked how long she had to wait until she could stop listening to him. He told her she had to listen to him for the rest of her life. She then looked him dead in the eyes and said: "I'll listen to you until the end of YOUR life."

One summer evening, Mom sang "You are my sunshine" to her, and Dana asked her to stop because she hated that song. Mom said how that's a shame because she used to sing it to her when she was in her tummy before she was born. Dana said in cold blood, "I hated it then too."

And finally, when Mom told her how she reminds her so much of herself, Dana courteously asked her to stop being so mean.

Dana's at the age when questions are becoming a daily, hourly thing. Mom's out of patience for answering them all, but nerdy and meticulous Dad has been enjoying this constant barrage of childish curiosity. For example, she had thousands of questions about why the buildings are the way they are. Our four-year-old Dana would be delighted to know that they're no more than twelve floors high and are simple in shape but not dull. They were made with the minimum amount of cement and plastics during the late 1990s, mostly from compressed earth blocks, straw bales, hempcrete, metal, and wood. Each floor has four big apartments in each corner (about 100 m<sup>2</sup>) and twenty medium apartments (50 m<sup>2</sup>) allocated as per the family size, not preferences. No apartments face north, just an open gallery greenhouse where edible plants are grown. Each floor has some communal spaces that encourage neighbours to mingle. The staircase in the middle of the building is partly made of glass, as is the central part of the roof. On the other area of the roof is soil for growing more edible shrubs and trees.

Each south-facing balcony, like the one they've got, has a set of solar panels instead of a glass railing. Roofs collect rainwater into underground reservoirs that are interconnected with all the buildings. Toilets are vacuum-operated composting ones, and the grey water is filtered in each block, partly through ponds and partly artificially. No roads exist except the main circular boulevard and the eight streets that converge around the Pine Pagoda at the centre. So, for example, when Mom must hail a taxi (for those rare occasions), she must walk just two minutes from their building to get to one of the streets. Every building has a small clinic, kindergarten, store and restaurant on the ground floor.

The parenting licence they had to get was stringent, but almost all parents pass the exam; a child rarely has to be taken away or a pregnancy aborted. Ultimately, nothing can prepare you for parenting, no matter how much effort and time you put in, reading the books, talking to elders, and setting the stage perfectly for the arrival of the leading actor. It's like buying the best flippers, snorkel, and swimwear and watching all the tutorials online while memorising all the data and researching the topic of swimming. Once you set your big toe into the water for the first time, you realise how little theory has to do with it. Plus, one always starts in the deep end, where one can't reach the bottom, standing up, gasping for air at the surface. One is thrown overboard in the middle of a thunderstorm somewhere far in the cold South Pacific Ocean.

Our brave sailors, Mom and Dad, were still not dissuaded, though! After surviving the early years, Mom realised that she could survive another. Especially since, slowly but surely, Dad was becoming even more helpful and attentive. This year he really did good, and Mom had some proper time off while he was on duty, picking Dana up from the nursery or a friend's place. Finally - Dad is now being a dad. As a couple, they were always a good team when working on something together. Even if one were useless at something, the other would take over completely, no matter the task. Still, it would be even better if they had learnt from each other more, not just depended on the expertise of the other partner because "Oh, she's just really good at that, why would I even bother? It would take me years to get it right! She'll keep doing that."

## Chapter 5 - Schooling

Throughout this 2005th year of our alleged lord, Dana's growing up is levelling off, in a way. She's still changing quickly, but these first few years were crucial and intense. Spending most of that valuable time with her parents was of utmost importance for her proper development. Dana is now jumping and running with ease, and she can draw and read her favourite stories she heard from Dad. As she just joined a primary school and she's one of the youngest there, it's rough for her. She's still not keen on teamwork, being bossy at times and moody. No one wants a moody boss who's the youngest in a company and names their creations improperly. Being enthusiastic is great at one moment, but then switching to crying or laughing at the other is as challenging as it gets. Sulking happens daily, especially when others don't notice her storytelling.

The first grade of primary school is without tables and chairs. So, for some, the rooms couldn't be called classrooms. There are still no videos, as fun games and playtime can be had without those. Lessons are being done outdoors at least half of the time and are handled by two teachers for a group of up to ten children at a time. This includes kids with special needs since at least one of those teachers is qualified to handle them properly. Inclusion and early independence are paramount, from the first grade all the way through to the ultimate fifteenth one. Kids don't spend more than six hours a day there, with weekends off.

By the end of the year, Dana's almost learnt to count to a hundred and got to grips with the alphabet somehow but struggles to tell the time. The concept of time, a silly invention on its own, is hard to grasp, even for adults. Her sentences are long, and her jokes are bad. So, she's already just like her dad. She made a friend on her third attempt. Her name's Beatrice and she loves to dance, especially with Dana. However, there's also an imaginary friend, Lucy. But they had a big disagreement, and Lucy went away to Antarctica for good.

Lastly, there was yet another friend with fur, four legs and wobbly ears. Dana suddenly starts showing a great deal of empathy towards all animals, and at times it seems more so than to Beatrice, for example. Doug, the pup, isn't feeling so well now, but hopefully, it'll

pull through. He was found in a nearby town, severely malnourished and with eyes not fully opened. On the other hand, Beatrice seems to have been born with two hearts and two sets of lungs. She's so hyper, brutally honest, and very artistic, but she may seem unfriendly to most and even annoying to some. But not to Dana!

All the while, the world's love affair with globalism is in full swing, as corporations are ruling the governments and waving a tattered and torn flag of democracy; this small settlement of weirdos and outcasts make their own food, of top quality and mind their own business. Businesses where companies don't have a managerial level since the employees vote annually for an "employee of the year" to become their leader. To outsiders, this may seem anarchical, but it is very organised, effective, and efficient.

While millions of people are imprisoned globally, there are no prisons here. However, criminals can be confined to their homes if deemed dangerous to society. But that doesn't mean that they've given up on them, as there are daily visits, consultations and serious work being done on making a change, a transformation for the better, in a humane way. The maximum punishment is exile, but so far, it hasn't happened to anyone.

There are lots of cameras everywhere, but they're used when a crime has been committed together with some undercover agents and lots of "citizen police" that not only looks for suspicious activity in their neighbourhoods but also through live feed and recordings of the inner workings of the government offices since all are public and fully transparent. Since smartphones are improving with better cameras, it's getting much easier to use them as evidence, together with concealed audio recordings. Of course, there are still (unarmed) policemen and policewomen that are well-versed in martial arts and don't wear silly, constrictive uniforms.

Just like these hard-working people, Mom and Dad are now working hard, Dad at work, but Mom is still a full-time mother. She had some activities and more free time when Dana was with other kids and parents. Of course, she was looking over others' kids as well. Dad was there the whole time, which rejuvenated the affection they used to have for each other, especially since Dad was acting like a good hubby and a daddy.

## Chapter 6 - Egos clash

Dana has got a bicycle! She quickly got in the hang of it but fell over many times since they didn't use the training wheels. Falling (and failing) properly is very important. She did have plenty of protection pads. Her ego didn't get bruised since she doesn't truly feel ashamed yet. However, no matter how hard the parents and the teachers try, growing an ego is inevitable. She's becoming more aware of herself and using her body in a coordinated way. She's been enjoying doing somersaults at school. At the beginning of the school year, she didn't like the new weekly yoga lessons, but since she's getting good at it, she's now struggling not to enjoy it.

It's not all sunshine and rainbows in Danaland, of course, as she seems to have developed (or had from before?) a powerful fear of deep water, of drowning. Since the first try, she hasn't gone to the big swimming pool all year. She's been reading very well, but she's picky. This year, she's been reading mainly about the natural world, their city life and its two hundred thousand inhabitants.

Those city dwellers don't have any temples to pray at, except four big parks with ponds (also for water purification and fire prevention). However, practising religion at home is allowed as long as no one is disturbed. Modest city decorations for various festivals are even encouraged. Of course, many people are seriously disgruntled with this, but after the recent poll, it seems they are just a very loud seventeen per cent. After the first few years of arduous work, average work hours have dropped below fifty hours a week because of a smaller workforce. Therefore, the opening crew have accumulated loads of LUX to spend on silly, useless things and travel.

The supply of all store items varies a lot; thus, sometimes grapes, for example, will be free of charge (sensibly rationed, of course), but at other times one should use their credits to import them. The same logic applies to the availability of holiday destinations and means of international transport. This summer, many cross-disciplinary, deep-tech "micro-factories" have been popping up, which don't necessarily have to specialize in producing just one thing. All are obliged to produce excellent quality, durable products. Thus, there is none of that profit-oriented "planned obsolescence" nonsense.

Another nonsense was Dana got into a fight with her “BFF” Beatrice at the daily P.E. class. Sulking was over by the next day, and the surprised teacher reported to Mom and Dad that their friendship was somehow stronger. What wasn't silly nonsense was that poor Doug didn't make it - he was found dead on the balcony where he was sleeping one quiet summer's evening. This shook up everyone, especially Dana, of course, but Mom as well. Dana became aware of death and how sudden and horribly unfair it can be, making her afraid of losing Mom tomorrow! This cheered up Mom, but she was hoping for Doug to grow up with Dana. Dad wasn't cheerful as he kept mentioning to Mom how he isn't important to Dana and how no matter how hard he tries to be a good dad, he can never be equally loved as a parent. This showed Mom how much ego was still there in him, and they started raising their voices at each other again, but not in front of their only daughter. It hurt her a lot when Dad said how a dog is not a replacement for a second child since she did want to have another baby. But for him, one is enough.

All this tension and drama didn't help Dad at all when explaining to Dana what happened to Doug and why, what a tumour was etc. - he was quite brutal about it. Mom thinks it went predictably since his parents were always telling him how things are, simply and bluntly. Mom likes to do things the “hard way” in order to phrase everything perfectly with correct parables and vivid examples.

This all means that Dana's getting an equal amount of Yin and Yang at home in the form of her parents. She and Beatrice are different, yet they work well. At times, they clash, sparks fly, and some harsh words spiced up with saliva fly too but, usually by the end of the day, the two “best friends foevah” forgive each other fully, no grudges left behind to simmer and fester away. Perhaps this is just one of a myriad of things that grown-ups should learn from the little people. Purity takes many forms, one of the rawest ones being – a young child. The more we try to help them grow up, we shape them to our liking, which just imprints our view towards life onto a helpless sponge of (near) infinite energy that trusts us completely. In all seriousness, when talking to a child about anything, we should indeed tread very lightly and gingerly, for we tread on dreams of little angels who are often much wiser than we selfishly think we are.

## Chapter 7 - Our little angel

Just as one trauma healed, with little Doug passing away to a place that has endless amounts of slippers, sticks and squirrels, Dana started losing her teeth! She's been having nightmares and trouble falling asleep. For a couple of months this summer, she's been cycling with Dad in the evenings just before bedtime. She says she likes it more than the storytelling and the story-reading. This helped Dad vent some extra energy while letting Mom enjoy some alone time at home for an hour or so every evening. By October, they were all feeling better individually as well as collectively.

Dana became one of the fastest at puzzles, mazes and matching games, and since she's getting taller now (and seems lanky), she isn't the shortest one in her group anymore and doesn't seem the skinniest. Her classmates are still comparing each other and competing in superficial ways, so no matter how hard people try to make the perfect educational system, there's always someone coming from a different family background (as people are still constantly arriving) that brings in some disorder. After one teacher helped her carve her own pencil, Dana has been doing secretive writing on her own, in a kind of a random diary. Not even Mom has noticed this. Usually, nothing gets by her detective's gut sensors.

Since "middle childhood" began, Dana's developed a sense of shame and asks for privacy for those "delicate matters". She's been having some crying meltdowns occasionally, but parents' attention and love always followed these. Bea (she doesn't like to be called Beatrice anymore) has been helping to accept these new emotional states as that wonderful child has some incredible intuition, and her parents are actively trying to preserve it as they see it as a God-given talent. Bea has a knack for knowing how to snap Dana out of her daydreaming moments when she spaces out completely. They both get these, of course, but Dana tends to get lost in them sometimes and seems offline. They've been cycling together the whole summer and a few times in winter. Parents don't allow them yet to cycle in snow, although several Finnish families from Oumi don't seem fazed one bit when the soft, quiet snow soundproofs the cycling paths.

This year has been very busy with immigration, and for a couple of months, the workers and the whole immigration system have been overrun with applications. Forty thousand people were accepted in this year alone, a new record! The screening process isn't perfect, as it's based on human interaction and trustworthiness. It's like signing an employment contract but without the blind forcing of stamped certificates and signed letters. When a couple of new immigrants were later found out to have been lying about their background and skills, they were exiled immediately. Usually, that wouldn't have happened so strictly, but since so many eager and even desperate people agree with the Constitution, why not be picky? The brunt of this system is taken by the immigration workers who interview and screen the candidates. After they're admitted, they have probation periods; after ten years, they're not followed as closely anymore. On a side note, some dwellers travelled to Africa to help with the Great Green Wall across the Sahel region. It seems very promising, especially since they've been doing the same in Isataion.

At parents' work, few people have children, so the parents get certain perks, like taking days off quickly and more often than others. Thus, this year, they've both been working less than seven hours a week, yet Dad, naturally, can't help himself and always finds a community project to get involved in. He would've been happier like this, being busy more; however, he was stressed out this year as he tried to get back in shape. Earlier this year, on his annual health check-up, quite a few findings showed abnormal levels, especially muscle mass, cholesterol, vitamins, and minerals. Not to mention his BMI, which has been near the top allowed ratio since they arrived seven years ago.

Even though there's only plant-based food in the city-state, there's still unhealthy junk food to be found, so he can't rely only on cycling and some morning stretching to keep him healthy. He's been having full-body check-ups monthly this year, with weekly guidance from professionals to help him stay on track. By December, he has made some progress with weight loss, plus he feels better and appears to be happier with himself. Returning to volleyball in November helped, too, while playing with the neighbours downstairs helped him mingle more and stay motivated.

## Chapter 8 - Crushed

Dana has a first crush! It's Carlo from the art workshops – a cute, shy boy that's always been friendly to her. The moment that sealed the deal was him helping a new, younger boy who was bullied (yes, that still happens in Isataion sometimes) by a couple of newcomers. There are still a few other “bestest” friends, but Bea is BFF which is carved in stone. The oddest thing was how Beatrice started acting over-protective of Dana and becoming jealous. Dana finds this amusing and flattering, yet she has melodramatic moments herself; for example, showing a lack of patience and starting to hate Fridays for some strange reason.

She's been going through significant changes this year, asking more questions than ever and even putting Dad out of place at times with some tough ones. She's been drawing a lot more (but writing less in her secret diary), so parents got her coal to start with. She loved it so much and showed swift progress, but when they got her brushes and paint – it didn't pan out, as she went back to coal and pencils. She's been covertly unravelling the infinite internet horizons, trying to make sense of all the information, but thankfully there is Wikipedia to double back on, her favourite.

By grade four, the mixing of students' ages had stopped, and Dana felt exposed as the youngest. Sports have been slowly becoming more serious, including (now daily) yoga practice, Dana's favourite part of the school day. Since this year, there have been fixed subjects like languages, math and arts & crafts. Students' projects sometimes get sold publicly. Another thing that Mom had some issues with is that parents are not allowed into classrooms like before. Thus, she's been very inquisitive this year, but towards teachers and their camera recordings of the lessons and activities. Since she now works about six hours a day, she's been having more time to focus on worrying about... well, lots of things.

She's been worrying less about groceries and rationing limits as Dana has started regularly joining her for the weekly hauls. They intentionally go to more distant neighbourhoods to get them, even though they can get almost everything in their building. Summer hauls are more attractive to Dana as there's so much variety with fresh and

mostly local produce. The winter ones are based around preserves, glass jars with pickled, sugared, dried, powdered and frozen foods. Potato flour is the mack-daddy! Thankfully, plenty of recipes are linked with the QR code on each of them; otherwise, winter would be dreadfully monotonous.

Dad hasn't missed even one of his weekly volleyball sessions and has been continuing to work on his health even though he got a pass from the doctors this January. Mom pushed hard to spend every weekend with Dana this year, with or without Dad. He was there for the first half of the year, but he eventually gave up and decided to spend this time on his hobbies, for example, working with a small team on electric hub motors for local taxis. Mom's okay with this, as she now can have a more thorough impact on Dana's upbringing. Luckily, she doesn't know what kind of shenanigans Dad is up to with Dana when they go cycling together.

Thirty thousand people moved in this year, mostly under forty years old, but the immigration system is handling it better than before, without much drama. Except for a couple of Albanian criminals that tried to hide from Interpol. The economy works just fine without currency, to the surprise of the government of Kazakhstan. Of course, FIAT currency is still being used, but direct trade and bartering are preferred. There's even a MAG-LEV railroad being built to a nearby city on the Ural River over a hundred kilometres away and one across the border to Volga, which is five hundred kilometres in the opposite direction. It's a jointly financed project that has tensioned the already tense relations between these two countries. But Isataion's diplomats have been able to compromise and mediate skilfully.

Another change is that citizens' skills are now appreciated in a more obvious way – for a certain number of hours spent at a job, a person gets publicly displayed medals (bronze, silver, gold...) that show their realm and extent of expertise. It seems promising to keep people motivated to continue working or trying different jobs, keeping them busy by feeling useful. As before, urgent openings are constantly stimulated by a higher LUX amount than usual. Data shows that about three-quarters are “jacks of all trades” and that the rest are not interested in changing their jobs and want to specialise in one realm. Dad has two gold badges, while Mom has nine bronze ones.

## Chapter 9 - Towards diary

As the 2008 global financial crisis hit the world hard, Isataion's economy remained unswayed. The air is clean; the water is pure, there's plenty of food, and a safe shelter is provided. There are no real-estate agents and corporations playing around with people's lives. The government owns the capital, the experts set prices and values, and the unions cross-check everything. The coordination of goals is mixed. Things are made well and designed to last as long as possible, just like the 1980's Mercedes-Benz cars.

Now a decade in, they finally have replaced all plastics with non-fossil ones based on seaweed leftovers. The plastic recycling factory is being retooled to convert ICE vehicles to full battery electric, with as many used components as possible. Most of the buses are electric and about half of the taxis are too, even though most people use cars only once a week on average. New machine learning algorithms are beginning to be tested, and there is some opposition to this, but it's minor. Polls say only twenty-four per cent don't want it.

Average working hours are below forty, and Mom and Dad are well below that. That is, if we don't count Dad's ongoing side projects. But still, if he manages to fix some problems at work, he won't be inventing new ones at home; that's what Mom says, at least. Dana's happy as she gets to ride around with him and explore the city and now the Periphery, which has slowly been expanding and looking greener every year. Dana wanted more independence to go biking alone through those farming communities. Mom was apprehensive, of course, but Dad was definitely on Dana's side as he saw how responsible she was in heavy traffic through bike lanes. The Periphery doesn't have dedicated bike lanes as it is mostly gravel roads, but there's way less traffic out there, and no one seems to rush anywhere. Lately, Dad even started pushing Mom to explore their ever-growing "countryside", so finally, this December, she admitted she was wrong about the safety over there and about Dana's skills. She now even joins them on rides sometimes.

Dana's stubbornness has been becoming a constant trait, and she's displaying a self-destructive kind that Dad calls "Inat", which his Serbian roommate from the cruisers so kindly explained and

demonstrated on numerous occasions. If kept in check, this can be a potent tool. For example, she tried hard to prove herself as a good rider and responsible citizen. Inat helped her to give her best under a lot of pressure and high expectations.

However, she fell down hard when trying to race one girl from one of the farm communities, trying to prove her wrong. She was fortunate that she didn't scratch herself in any visible spot and that the girl came back to check on her and to take her to her mom for wound mending. This was the first time Dana made friends with someone from the Periphery, as most of the kids in her groups were from the city. The quiet, yet wild freedom this girl possessed aroused a new-found admiration for the "wildlings", as she was calling them up to that point. Now she sees them differently and calls them "outsiders", which has no negative tone to her, yet.

Carlo has been irritating at times. It's funny and somewhat sad how feelings can change over the course of a year between two people, no matter their age. They've been still spending some time alone together, but less, as he is suddenly becoming too boyish. Bea approves of this and tries to spend more time with her alone. Naturally, Carlo dislikes that curly little rascal for stealing his "girlfriend" from him. The two BFFs started drawing flora & fauna together recently, mainly on the tablet PCs and enjoying the now comparatively more challenging workshops at school. They like breaking things apart to the tiniest particles, while Dana is usually left alone in trying to figure out how to put it all back together as Beatrice flies off, together with her fleeting focus.

At the beginning of the year, Dana started writing her diary daily, but by summer, it was done weekly and by autumn, monthly. Finally, after talking to Mom, she decided to start writing an annual one regularly and a daily one whenever something interesting arises. This will become a kind of yearly report, as Dana's birthday is in late December. Looking back at the year, sharing her feelings about what happened and writing down her intentions for the upcoming one. Dad found a heavy, old wood-covered book for this, which the two of them worked on restoring together, doing some light carving on the covers. Dana feels that this book, her future diary, has some powerful magic imbued into it from the previous owner.

## Dana's diary

My dear diary, you are the most beautiful book that I have ever seen in my life! I will cherish you and treat you well and never forget to write to you. Today is my birthday and I have just finished yummy dinner with Mom and Dad. We had mostly carrot cake. I wish people could live on cake. Cakes make people feel good! I have been writing a diary for few years now, but that was very irregular. I still do that, whenever there is something interesting or important happening in my life, I write it down. It helps me when I want to remember some details for later and it makes me feel better too. These entries here, will be more like year-in-reviews and next year's hopes and plans.

I started middle school this September! It still takes 6 hours of my day, but I am so ready to become older. Being one of the youngest sucks. I feel like I have to work harder than everyone else, just to catch up, but mostly to prove myself to my classmates, that I am not behind them. I have been sitting in the first row so actually, they are the ones who are behind! There are new subjects to study (half of them we selected) like natural sciences and social studies. History and geography are hard! Some of them are even harder than before, like IT and PE. We have to meditate each day, but I like being still. I usually do it quickly, and then I enjoy my thoughts for longer, thinking of impossible things with my eyes closed, looking at the insides of my eyelids. The second language I chose is Esperanto, it seemed the easiest. Not so many students in that class, though. Since the first semester is already over, for the next one I might select a new language, we'll just have to wait and see what I decide. Oh, and also, my Mom does not walk with me to school anymore, everyone says there is no need, but Mom does not seem to fully believe that. She can be really annoying sometimes, with all the questions and worries. I tell her that, and then she tells me how annoying I was with my questions when I was younger. I replied to her that at least I was not worrying about her, needlessly. She usually does not have anything to reply in return. I still like to ask a lot of questions. Even during those biology lessons when we talked about human reproduction. Most of the kids laughed at me, but I think they just envy my incessant thirst for knowledge. My biology teacher said that and I agree!

My best friend, Beatrice, is really fun! She does things I would never dare to do. She is very brave and I hope that one day I can also be like her. I think our friendship is stronger than ever now! I have other friends too of course, but I only have two pages of my diary to fill and since I plan to live over a hundred years, I cannot write any more than that per year. Bea can say the most unbaked thoughts sometimes, and that makes Carlo laugh. She disliked him at first, but I think they are becoming friends, very slowly. I like to tell her that “you can’t unbake a cake – it’s out”. I must add that all three of us have been talking a lot about global climate change, even in our short lives, we have noticed strange weather patterns, especially in winter. Sometimes I really feel helpless and insignificant. But at least I think, that maybe I could swim, sometime in the future. I still feel so terrified when I get into deep water, but I just focus on my breathing and I don’t panic anymore. I am as proud of myself as my parents are of me!

I went camping in the Periphery with Dad many times this summer. He said that was needed to bond with each other and nature. I wish I get older faster, so I can bond with nature by myself. He snores so loudly sometimes, I cannot hear any of the frogs, birds and crickets at all. The tribe-folk, as he calls the people that live on the farms, are very nice I think, they seem more relaxed than us, city-folk. They all live in tiny houses, in groups of 12 with a big house they share. Since we all have to work at least one hour a week on the farms, we are all kinda familiar with their way of living there. I think that I would love it for a short time, but living there all the time would be so boring. Dad has been teaching some interns from there and he says they ask so many questions, much more than city kids. He also does not like to be followed around all the time. I think teaching is not a job for him. He should be alone, in some garage with lots of tools and no kids. I feel like I want to know more about the greenhouse domes, I would like to go there next year again and see if they would let me sleep there sometimes. If they do not let me, I’ll get Bea and she will find a way to sneak in for sure. She is wilder than any of those kids there, my fearless curly-haired warrior!

*Yours, Dana*

## **Birthday #11**

My dear diary, this spring has been so weird, I mean, there wasn't any, really. Finally, my parents get it, or at least are starting to get it and worry about climate change and my future. Biology became kinda stupid, which was now showing those body parts we learnt last year. I definitely didn't want to stand up and ask any questions, I didn't want any attention on me. I already get some strange looks from boys, I guess it's about my breasts. What really is disgusting is pubic hair! I hope it falls off very soon, yuck! I'm confused about Carlo and how to feel about him. I'm both disgusted and attracted! I'm disgusted because of THAT biology lesson, but I'm attracted to him now, because I see him differently, more than a friend. I even caught myself imagining how it would look like if we were together. Confused!!

Beatrice has been also confusing. She's more active now, but mostly hangs out with me. I'm not used to that friendly and extroverted attention from her. She's been giving the best hugs ever, or maybe just wanted some back. I always liked hugs, but now I see they were too short! She also started looking embarrassed with me, at the oddest times, I'm not sure what's going on with her, she's still very secretive with me, but I support her and love her unconditionally, nonetheless. I gave a few hugs to Carlo, and he was properly confused and awkward, made me laugh out loud in front of him, and that made him blush in turn. I think I never blush about anything... Hm, I should ask Bea tomorrow when I see her at the ice rink.

Like I said, parents support me with my online activism regarding environmentalism, but Mom has been annoying in a new way. She started going to regular meditations and doing daily journaling, which is both fine and dandy, however, she started acting like we're best buds since forever. But at least, since Mom started changing habits, Dad started feeling left out and sneakily started some changes himself. He won't admit it, he's way too proud of that. Overall, I found a way to react less to them, I don't ignore them either (because our psychology teacher said ignoring is lying to yourself) and I feel now more powerful, that is, they seem to have less power over me somehow. Oh yes, once, he wanted to sit me down, and clumsily tell me about the "birds and the bees," but as I started falling over with

laughter as soon as he called it that, he got so upset! I then told him that he was a year late. He thinks now that our education system is not good. He forgot how pointless and stupid his was, with all the pressure, competition, scores, homework and tests. I talked to many of my classmates who moved in recently, from abroad – they're full of horror stories from their home countries! I don't love our schools, but I do like them, honestly. Especially the floor heating, (sometimes) flipped but also grounded classrooms - not students!

I got my first phone, I got the SP3 model though. I like how it has a great camera, a fingerprint and how tough and rugged it is. That's the one with the smallest screen, and an old-school keyboard. Next year I can swap it for the flipping 4 though! You know what I also got, my dear diary? Acne! I was watching other girls getting them and now it got to me too. My skin looks like it's about to explode! Also, few months ago I started a growth spurt, I have already caught up to the class average, more or less. I just need to remember to apply the stretch marks cream every day, twice, so I don't end up looking like Sarah from Ecology classes. She showed me her back... She refused to use the cream and her parents let her refuse it, idiots!

This January I got my smart ID card! It looks like a normal card, but it has many chips inside, which can be programmed for many things. People here don't have keys and they use the cards to get into the bus, get a bike, get groceries and then we can log into our account on the PC and track everything that we do. I do have a tablet PC that I got last year for studying so I don't need to carry big backpacks with books and notebooks to school. We all have some notebooks, but our backpacks are full of snacks and water bottles instead. On the tablet I can surf the web and watch videos, but it's very limited access and I need to wait until I'm 15 to be able to select the "unsafe internet" option. That's so stupid, and everyone I know thinks so!

I've been hiding you from Mom, my diary, so recently, I've asked a new friend from the farm to put a lock on you. I had a really nice day with her - riding bikes and "stealing" unripe food. Maybe sometime in the distant future someone will discover you so you can tell my stories of this place and this time here, in detail, and adjectives.

See you next year,  U, Dana

## **Birthday #12**

And just as I expected it to, it caught up to me. Menstruation! It's not as bad as I was told it could be. In the biology lessons it seemed overrated. Mom told me a story about how she got hers for the first time, and it was a horror story since no one ever told her what that was before. As she felt the stabbing pain and streams of blood gushing down her legs, she realized she had been sick for a while with something terminal, and now, she was going to die. She remembered that grandma was upstairs and as she crawled up the stairs, crying her eyes out, grandma started laughing and applauding at her. I can't even imagine how my 12-year-old Mom must've felt...

Anyway, the good news! Thankfully, I'm finally gaining weight, and my vertical growth has slowed down. I wouldn't want to be too tall. Average everything is just fine with me, I don't like standing out. I don't care what these stupid boys think of perfect feminine attributes! Just as I felt I was getting more chill at the beginning of this year, since the new grade I started getting "the moods". Sometimes I'm just aware of my body too much, but I've also started noticing other people's bodies and awkwardness...es. Like, Carlo, for example – he's growing a freaking mustache! Most boys don't have it yet, so his stick out like a giraffe in a herd (dazzle?) of zebras. And as if that's not enough, I noticed his voice recently started cracking. It's safe to say I lost my interest in him and all the boys in general. I think my love for hip-hop came at the perfect time, as I really enjoy baggy clothes. That made Dad very happy, as he used to do rap when he was younger. I still have his photo somewhere of his troupe, looking soooo tough back then, O.G. Dad, OMG!

I've been having more clashes with Mom on the topic of our future, as they still don't seem to fully get it. They say they do, but they don't. Even some classmates of mine don't get it. Carlo sometimes shows how little he knows about it, especially in class. I guess his parents don't care at all. Sometimes I think I know more about how our Earth works, than most of the people in the United Nations, honestly... they and their hypocritical "Sustainability Goals"! Parents were also annoying and downright embarrassing with their version of "sex-ed" – when Mom's talks failed (miserably), Dad pretended he forgot to close

some web pages on his home PC... Pfff, so cheesy! I'm not so interested in that anyway, I know how stuff works enough, not to want it, at least not for now AND especially not with Carlo! To think that I was imagining us holding hands and kissing last year, YUCK! Speaking of that, I noticed that Mom and Dad aren't doing these (I guess kinda cute) things as much. I'm not sure if I should talk to them about this? I mean, they are the adults here. BFF has been acting very, VERY strange this year, she's even more confusing now. She just said she got into trouble with her parents about something, but doesn't want to say what it is. Her parents are not as strict as Carlo's, so I don't get it, really. The weirdest part is, that Bea really seems happier, much more confident, just how she used to be. I tried so many times to talk to her, but she's been dodging it sneakily.

Dad's been abroad this year, helping his colleague teach some team about some new battery chemistry and software. He was there just for a couple of months this autumn, but when he came back, he also seemed very happy and confident. And as soon as Dad came back, he did some upgrades to the home PC, now it's an upcycled A.I.O. (I just googled that it means it's an All-In-One) and he also said that he knows a guy from the city that's been working on our own OS, that will be used across PCs, tablets and phones. That, I think is cool and useful. My SP4 hasn't felt so useful, it's more like a cool accessory. Anyway, Dad's been a lot into this upcycling, reusing and repurposing of "broken" tech and I honestly admire him for that. Another "secret" he told me is that from next year, all city bicycles will start to get electrified with front-wheel motor kits – that means I could go to the farms more often and further than before! Oh, and a couple of days ago, we were told at school that when browsing, we now have three official internet options: Local only, Global-safe and Global-unsafe. And to access it, we need to use our IDs... dang it!

So overall, it's been one of the most eventful years so far, the good, the bad and the bloody. I'm really happy to be living in a place like this, the more I see on the videos how the rest of the world lives, I don't think I want to travel anywhere. I hope the rest of the world stops making fun of us here and learns a thing or two, it won't hurt them. Here, the natural environment and actual lives of animals (including us!) are cherished and not because of money.

## **Birthday #13**

The only thing I'm happy about my previous entry is that I stopped the "my dear diary"- crap, but I'm really not happy how much slang I used. I still think this should be more informal than formal, and my English teacher agrees. He basically said you can do it any way you want, it's YOUR diary and it's not for a wide audience. Probably.

Let's start first with my first-ever trip abroad! I got voted into the history finalists this year, yay! I'd prefer the random selection of the finalists, but I won't complain about my dumb luck! It was a bit unnerving that we got pepper spray - all girls get one when they're travelling abroad. But I must say my confidence is improving, hanging out with the hip-hopers all the time. I guess that was the proof that I was accepted by others. Cool perhaps? Three of us went to Greece and even though it was supposed to be educational, it felt like we were just blending in with the tourists and the teacher Kosta I guess seemed like our dad! I saw him shedding a tear on many occasions, he said it felt so good to visit Greece and share its history with us. I had crazy fun getting there - through the Dardanelles, Bosphorus, the Black Sea and the Caucasus... Even though I wasn't so close before with Nazgul and Ruslan (the other two classmates), it seems like we have a strong bond now that will last, even though we're not like close friends, but they're both pretty cool if I'm to be asked.

Dad has been taking it real easy this year with work. He said he had never spent so few hours a week on a job. So, naturally, he's been tinkering with all kinds of tech projects. As the years pass, he's been getting better at the... smaller things and he's been speaking to me about his projects in acronyms. Still, he's really into upcycling and fixing things everyone else gives up on in order to turn them into something useful and even beautiful at times. He seems to be nicer to Mom, kissing her often (ewww!). She's been very distant since summer, plus, like usual, she's been changing jobs, sometimes even twice a year. She seems calmer, but I'm not sure whether she's happier... At least she doesn't mind Dad being affectionate to her.

While I'm on the topic of affections, Beatrice has been showing me loads, together with trust, talking about deepest emotions, however... Still avoids talking about that mysterious problem she had with her

parents. I saw them going to the store, to collect the order, and they all seemed so happy together, like a really ordinary family. At least Bea said she'll tell me more when the time comes.

While on the trip, I thought I won't miss my parents. But a couple of weeks in, I realized that I missed Mom. I also realized that I didn't miss Dad. Is that bad? I don't know, but it made me sad. I missed Mom because... I really love her so much! I know that there are many things we disagree on, especially because of the generation gap, but we understand each other deeply. She's always there for me when I need her. She knows so well when to switch to jokes and when to turn the conversation serious. Also, when to give me a hug.

Dad is really nice and like I said, this year has been showing progress, but I only noticed that after I came back. Maybe he missed me? If so, why he didn't say so? Should I approach him and ask? I mean, who's the adult here, why should I be the one who's willing to fix communication breakdowns? I'm starting to see how he didn't get enough of some things (love) when he was young. He doesn't talk much about his parents and he only says that they were too busy to be there for him. Yet, he's a workaholic also! The cycle needs to be broken, otherwise, it just continues over and over into infinity. I talked a lot to Carlo about this and his parents. At least he's there for me.

I guess I should write down what's been going on in the world again, but honestly, why should I care if it doesn't affect us here? Mostly it's about banks, politics, marketing, social networks, cancer and depression... and a brave man called Snowden. We don't have those problems here. Even if I could find one, it would probably be someone who just arrived in Isataion. Seeing the beautiful, colourful, warm and busy Greece (and Istanbul too!) was lovely, but there were locals there who couldn't hide their sense of desperation, even though they were smiling. I wish all of them could come and join us here, but that's just wishful thinking.

As for this beautiful book of mine, I'll keep the annual entries, but also do daily entries in my notebook. I'm becoming less excited about birthdays, including my own. I'd rather use this to write down my (many) emotions, feel lighter and perhaps share this with someone in the future. Maybe some big journalist will discover you and we'll become famous!

## Chapter #14

Friendship is, I have realized, not family. You can have both, but I think that's really rare. I don't know anyone here who has an actual friendship with their parents AND their sibling(s). I even asked some teachers this, who confirmed that it's rare. Plus, my parents don't seem so cool most of the time. Cool as in interesting, but cool as in chill, relaxed. Especially Mom! She's been worrying and asking fewer questions in the last couple of years, but at times... uh! It takes so much self-control not to swear at her sometimes. But I know I'd regret that the next day. Dad's been cool until this summer, when he started to be overbearing, it's as if he took over her role, that she lost a couple of years ago.

School-related news, but Carlo is the main protagonist. On my way to the school food garden, I saw and heard Carlo arguing with some classmates about someone. He was trying to defend that person, especially how she looks and behaves and he also said that person is cool, "Way cooler than you guys!". The next day I found out the person he was talking about was... me. It really hit me hard, as this year I was trying hard to, you know, fit in. Also, I felt bad for him because I was disgusted with him last year so much, and now, this year, all boys have the damned moustache. He is so sweet! I remembered how and why I got a crush on him in grade four. I was fighting with my feelings for an agonizing month, and then I found him when he was alone in the park and decided to tell him. He was so embarrassed! I told him all true compliments and gave him a kiss. My first!! A proper one too for that matter. And then I ran back home! It's been awkward being around him since, but I'm smiling so much more, because of him. I just hope he relaxes a bit around me... I wouldn't want us to lose our friendship over a kiss! I can't be wrong... it felt so good!

I had the best sleepover at a friend's place on the Periphery! It's the same family that helped me with the lock on the diary. They're just so different! You can tell they're all (almost) friends, so supportive and understanding. But she told me that there are still many families there which are very typical and "backward". She really likes to use that word, like, a lot! I slept over at other friend's places but this one was special. I wish my parents would let me bring friends over more often.

They don't explicitly ban it, but I can see how uncomfortable they get when someone new is around, especially Dad. Mom's kinda happy since she wanted me to have a sibling anyway. I guess that didn't happen because of him? I don't even need to ask.

In other news (I always wanted to write that, like a real reporter, haha), we got loads of new immigrants this year, mainly from Syria, as the situation there is quite horrible, people killing each other over... I don't even know what this time. Probably land, resources, religion or some other dogmas. But most of the people who come in are lovely and kind and so grateful to be here. However, older residents are getting afraid and want a fence around Isataion.

Some new kids in the classrooms can get problematic, but teachers know how to care for them. Especially the few kids with PTSD and one with a serious speech impairment. I'm glad we're all trying together to help them heal and not shunt them away from society. I heard that some of them were complaining about the lack of mosques (or any temples) but they knew that's how things are here before they signed their "previous life off".

For the last week I've been watching the live stream of the council, still discussing what to do with our "crime and punishment" system. It takes a lot of time for each felony and crime to be assessed by the council, the A.I. and the general public (with votes), but it did show it works the best. As for the punishments, the lowest one is "cured" with labour; for example, if someone was recorded and caught littering, they would work in the city maintenance department for a year. Some more serious offenders can be "locked up" in home custody (with the length of the "sentence" decided for each case individually), which is how we avoided having prisons. Removing one's freedom is the highest form of punishment, aside from taking their life. And lastly, there is exile which occurs very rarely, with less than a dozen of people getting kicked out per year.

Anyway, I'm so grateful that my parents were brave enough to move here with me in Mom's belly. It's like an utopian story almost. The city and the farms really seem sure-footed now, and... everything just works. Especially schooling! I'm so excited for next year. Why? Because I'm moving up to high school! I hope Carlo selects the same subjects, so we can be deskmates too, hehe!

## **Birthday #15**

I always read at least one previous entry before I start writing a new one. Funny how I mentioned writing like a reporter, I've been really getting into blogging and "reporting" on my social networks. My English teacher has been following me and then praised me, first publicly and then privately, for my writing! That boosted my confidence so much and I really want to get into writing regularly. So, from now on, this will also be the place to report the yearly news, haha!

I guess I should start first with the world outside of me, which includes this whole city. I am worried about the new AI "counsellor" we got in the government and how quickly it has progressed. I'm not against using it in the government (unlike a fifth of our publicly worried citizens) but of its further progress and direction. At least at the moment, it can't vote, it's just being used to speed up the processes and keep an "eye" on irregularities. A new mini-factory started producing plastics with mycelium, mostly for insulation and packaging. That is another valuable asset we can export once we have enough for our needs.

As the Paris Climate Agreement is about to get signed in a few months, this year's summer was scorching us all ominously. That wouldn't be such a big problem for us hadn't the refugees started "accumulating" on the main road entrance. The last empty apartments are being finished (way too slowly, though) and we still have space left for 100k immigrants. As winter started, people from the farms have been donating lots of food and basic supplies, but I heard that a couple of these poor souls froze to death last week. If more keep arriving and our immigration system doesn't speed up... I'm not sure what's going to happen with them. Winters here are pretty harsh. Seems like Isataion isn't such a perfect place after all.

And finally, our government just started using cryptocurrencies with FIAT ones, for trade and our travels abroad. As well as for some resources that we don't have here. It must be noted that we always prioritize importing what others call waste instead of brand-new things, even though it's more expensive to recycle rubbish. I can understand that it's difficult for foreigners to understand how our economy works without actual money, but it does.

Beatrice has again sunken back into “recession”, and getting her to do anything involving people is tough. She doesn’t even want to come over for sleepovers anymore! She’s now really good at turning topics around into jokes, saying something funny about something serious. It’s like she’s becoming a real, scary manipulator. Like a... politician! She’s now really into heavy metal, with style and all. I like some kinds of metal, like folk and industrial, but I didn’t tell her I still listen to hip-hop, she wouldn’t understand. I stopped looking like I listen to anything specifically; I think that’s quite stupid actually. I quit trying to fit in when I realized recently, during an exercise in a psychology class, that I have FOMO. I didn’t even know about that until then. I don’t want to care about missing out on something or looking cool... whatever, I’m me, and I can listen to whatever I want! I’ll tell Bea next week. I know at least she can accept me the way I am!

I think I’m falling in love?! Can I really know intuitively what love is and how it feels? Or are these misconceptions implanted into me by parents, media and society? I don’t really know, but I do know I feel so great and I do care about Carlo. He’s so gentle, sometimes insecurely so. But I kinda like that about him, this purity. He couldn’t pretend to be anyone else, even if his life depended on it. I don’t have a type, but I do know for sure that total honesty is a must-have! We’ve been getting too close, a bit grabby (both of us), but I’m not ready for anything more, and he’s so amazing in his understanding of this. Other boys, as my girl-friends tell me, have a real problem in understanding the words STOP and NO. I’m very lucky that Carlo is so empathic and sensitive. Of course, my parents don’t know about this still, but we manage to see each other regularly.

Another great thing is that our friendship has become even stronger, and I must say I’m surprised at that - that’s not what the other girls report. Dad noticed that I’m spending a lot of time with Carlo and has been asking so many damn questions about him and “us”. It’s like he can sniff that I’m lying to him. I don’t like doing this, but since he’s so strict in this aspect (even possessive), I know that he would try to stop us somehow and ruin everything. I’m not his little girl anymore, and recently I told him that if he continues to be like this, he will lose me forever. I stopped going for rides with him after so many years. That makes me so angry... and sad.

## **Birthday #16**

This has been quite an eventful and even painful year for many here, and I'm not really sure where and what to start with. Bad news first, I guess, that's the optimists' choice.

The European refugee crisis has become quite serious, even at our doorstep. Any country that showed empathy got overrun by refugees, which must not mean that being humane and offering a helping hand is wrong; not working as one team, on the same level is the root of the problem. All the while, at our actual doorstep, an actual camp has been formed - Dad calls it "Syrian Woodstock", but it's not only people from Syria. Our immigration has been getting increasingly overloaded, and crimes are being committed by some desperate people hoping to get admitted. Our special police force was quite gentle at first, but things were escalating all summer, and there were some deaths, accidental apparently. Seems like all the police officers are the same, even in our modern neo-polis. Things got progressively worse when one of our citizens detonated a homemade bomb and killed 28 people, some of who were children. It's so hard to write this... I even thought about how I would feel (slightly) less horrible if he had attacked our people instead. I had a parallel in my mind of someone terrorizing a helpless, innocent dog and how much it hurts to witness such a thing, from a human perspective...

This psychopath became a citizen in 2007, which was the year when immigration tried to speed things up. This... unstable person, got in without anyone doubting him even a bit; plus, our algorithm totally missed the ingredients he was buying for his explosive. 28 lives is a high price to pay, for a lesson. A couple of months ago, the Populus voted for a fence to be built around the Periphery (72% of people voted for it), and I must say I understand the people from the farms, being afraid, and putting their families' lives ahead of the wildlife's and the refugees'.

That's enough reporting; time to write about my own life! Mom has found out about me and Carlo, and her first reaction was okay. Later when she realized how long I had been "hiding the truth", she did become quite angry with me, and disappointed. Dad was also hurt by this. I thought they would be more upset about Carlo, than about

some stupid lies. If I had known... of course, I wouldn't lie to them, I hated every time I had to. I guess I didn't have to at all, I chose to. Anyway, I have decided to tell them the whole truth, about everything. Let's see how that goes for everyone involved, shall we?

I was trying hard to prove to my parents that I'm not a little girl anymore, but they teased me when I told them that Carlo and I broke up and made up a couple of times this year. Isn't that part of learning? Why a mistake has to be laughed at, when it's the best way to learn? Anyhow, Carlo has been annoying at times, and wonderful at others. We really enjoy going to every festival we have here, the four big solstice ones and dozens of other music and cultural ones in between. Those are the only moments where we never have any disagreements. Sitting here at my desk today, I don't know what to feel. I miss him, since I haven't seen him in a week, but I don't know how long will my affection last when we're together. Is it going to fade because of him, or is it because of me and my thoughts, feelings and fears? I guess that he really is a nice guy, when compared to other boys from my grade. I even heard of some new boys secretly recording girls having sex and posting them all over the internet, for revenge! I know that two boys got suspended because of that, while one whole family got exiled. So at least shit like that doesn't go unpunished. Nevertheless, it could happen even here.

I'm literally getting nowhere with Bea, she's so stubborn and closed up, and her joke counterattacks are really lame. We still talk a lot, but now it's mostly online... Carlo has been desperately trying to get some points from Dad, I almost pitied him on a few occasions, but overall, I admire him for that, especially as Dad has been playing "hard to get", haha! I can see that the two of them could hit it off actually; they have so many common interests, plus, Mom told me Dad was hoping for a boy instead of me. Oddly, I overheard him mentioning sterilization when talking to Carlo once, but neither of them will tell me anything! Guys are weird like that, apparently.

The best thing that happened for me this year, is discovering "people watching" (Bea calls it "sniping") together with photography. I try to tell people's stories without being judgmental too much. Paradoxical, I know. My followers are loving it, and I even got PMs from some of the "starring roles" praising me for my originality.

## **Birthday #17**

Let me start this entry with another announcement – from my random daily diaries, I'll paste here a “picturesque moment” I witnessed that I think is worth sharing. I take lots of photos, but I won't be adding them to a diary. I'll share this year's right away – a dad and his young teenage daughter are playing in one of the parks with a kite, and after many attempts and her almost giving up, she manages to have it take off. She smiles and jumps for joy, and he runs to her to give her a big fat hug saying, “You see?! That's why I was telling you not to give up yet!”. The still unspooling kite tether slips from her hand, and in a blink of an eye, somehow, he manages to catch it. Their shocked speechless faces transforming into a singular laughter - a gleaming portrait of family love and good karma.

I wanted to start with this so I could transition to my own father. He was always so stiff and sometimes very cold and distant. As the years went on, he actually became a better father to me, but I don't remember ever having such profound, honest, relaxed moments with him. After my speech at school, which I did for a psychology project, he changed so much. I didn't know he would watch the recording, and I spoke about the importance of having both parents, regardless of blood connection and gender. If I knew he'd be sitting and watching... I either wouldn't write some parts at all, or just wouldn't go on stage.

The next day, he broke down in front of me and actually said he was SORRY. He never ever said that, even to Mom, at least not genuinely. He said he knew he was not a good father, but he'd been working on his fears recently with a psychotherapist and making much progress. I noticed that. He was slowly changing over the last couple of years. Also, he's still been working on his fitness. Probably the physical self-work sparked the mental one. I feel like I finally have a “normal” dad.

Aside from the mag-lev train track opening this spring, most city-related news has been somewhat bleak. The Fergana Valley conflict has been heating up, and most people I talk to just don't care. Many here don't even know how few of our products are made from their cotton, so no one's complained. Aside from this summer's water

rationing, the Uzbek government has kept sucking the water supply dry with their cotton farming for decades.

We have gone over 400k, yet there's still room to spare. The perimeter fence has been built, and a 100-strong ex-military militia team has been formed, keeping the refugees at bay. 85% of citizens were for this, so I guess we're not a pacifist society anymore?

In my personal life, Carlo has been getting cold and distant many times this year, but then, I did that as well, when he was the "warm one". I have no idea what to do with this, and I don't know whether this means all relationships are like this or not. Anyway, after one fight we had, I went to Bae's for a sleepover, we had such a great time, but then we found a bottle of wine that her dad got for her mom. I never really had wine before, and, unsurprisingly, I got sooooo drunk, and so did Bea. Our memory of the event is equally foggy, but the next morning we were both sure that we really bonded that night.

It was a bit too much for me to bear, and Bea told me why it wasn't for her and why she was so weird for the past few years. She knew I wasn't into all that, and she was afraid she would lose me as a friend if she were to tell me. I didn't want to be the last one to find out! Let alone this way, personally! After a couple of weeks of disbelief, followed by confusion, I accepted it. I'm glad it happened, but whatever happened there will stay there. Our friendship is stronger than ever, and that's what is most important! We're happy that I'm not against LGBTs after all, as I can see things differently now. And if I were not to, I would be a big fat hypocrite, wouldn't I be?

Resuming relationship with Carlo afterwards was quite normal, but I see that with time, our relationship is getting more physical, which is odd. I was told relationships start like that and that, with time, "sexualities" happen less and less often. I understand why Bae is not into men. I can see the same disappointment in Mom when Dad mistreats her sometimes. All relationships are so complicated!

Finally, on a side note, I promise never to erase even a single word from this diary when writing it. I have been using a pencil and eraser thus far, but from now on, only ink pens! No filtering, second-guessing, editing or whatever. Same with "unsending" a text message with friends. I've already been writing my blog like this for a while. Thus, straight from the gut to the paper!

## **Birthday #18**

To avoid having these diary entries start to look like news reports (I have my daily blog for that), aside from the “picturesque moments”, I'll add a brief description of a new person I met, both from my daily diaries.

The moment and the person are the same for this year – probably the most beautiful girl I have ever seen, with brown curly hair, piercing brown eyes, full lips with a big smile, long legs with, a perfectly feminine walk with a perfectly feminine waist. She was walking a dog that was the opposite of her, one leg and ear missing, covered in scars all over its tired, limping body. They passed by my park bench once, but when they did a second time, I had to stop and talk to her. She seemed to be really lovely inside as well, having a tough life in Namibia with parents getting forcefully separated by the racism-fuelled fear from their community and families. Yet, she spends her credits here fostering “death row” dogs from Russia and helping them rehabilitate and find a family here. After she told me her story, I felt bad because I realized I had subconsciously judged her just by seeing her gorgeous appearance. I really need to work on that.

This morning I spent some of my credits on something wild - a Cuban cigar - which turned out to be disgusting! I gave it to Dad instead, and I don't remember seeing him so childishly happy about a thing, haha! After feeling like an impulsive idiot, I felt pleased about my decision. However, I'm not sure if I feel like an adult suddenly. Yesterday I wasn't one, but today I am? What a load of crap that is. Periods are another load of the same! They have become so painful this year! I need all five monthly days off to take things easy at home now. Meanwhile, Bea has been just needing one since she was twelve, and mostly spent the other four playing video games and binge-watching videos. Also, I now call her Bae privately. She fell madly in love with a girl from grade eleven, but now that she's also “an adult”, they're keeping it all a hush-hush.

Speaking of relationships, after the first half of a year of a stale habitual one with Carlo, we finally (and actually this time!) broke up this August. The turning point was a fight we had after we literally crashed into each other, while riding bikes. I lost a front tooth and all

respect for him. We went from having a crush - to crashing into each other. That is, until a week later, when he started being super lovely, being pathetic and saying all these beautiful things I always wanted him to tell me while we were together. Now they don't mean a thing to me. Is he a manipulator or just one of the guys that just don't appreciate what they have, until they lose it? My tooth and bone are healing quickly, but I'm not sure about my desire for boys.

High school has been truly amazing, by the way. It's been even better than I dreamt it would be. Over the last three and a half years, we've been getting more and more practice and less and less classroom time. This is excellent timing, since now it's mostly desk-based, with 20 other students and lots of serious books and data. Now I'm in G14, and about 80% is spent on practical work, on our chosen subjects, that's how I earnt those (stupidly wasted) LUX. I changed my phone to SP6, and I just noticed afterwards that there's a really smart XP5 flip-phone to get as well. After just getting used to the one I got, I don't want to bother changing everything again.

An introverted yet brave 15-year-old blond girl from Sweden has given me hope for our collective future. As the world was in a global protest, our "doorstep refugees" dispersed, and the city was nearly full (440k!). After I told Dad the story of the "Namibian Queen", he finally told me about his parents and Mom's. His were never really there for him, and she lost hers when she was nine. She grew up mostly with her grandma, and after she died, Mom went onto that cruise ship where she met Dad and slowly fell in love, leading to an "OOPSY!" moment, which in turn brought all three of us here... Finally, I know more about my grandparents.

The reason for this change in him is that he actually started going to psychotherapy! Who would've thunk it?! He did struggle a lot when he was telling me how I was an unplanned child, but he actually said it! I knew before, from Mom, but his saying how he struggled to accept me for the first few years took some courage. Naturally, we then cried and hugged. I hope Mom joins him, I'd want the two of them to be happier with each other, as now, they don't need to take care of anyone, just themselves. Honestly, I don't want to be their parent; they're the adults! I love them more than anyone else, but we all need to be accountable for our mistakes.

## **Birthday #19**

It's the last year of my schooling life here! Only one more semester to go! I have so many mixed emotions! Mostly doubts about my subject's selection and specialization, apprenticeship (which was so rewarding!) but also about the uncertainty of life, and my future, of course! I've been single for most of the year, having some dates (so many fake profiles online!) and a couple of relationship attempts, but I'm happy where I am at the moment. Bae/Bea had the same year, basically, except she got into the finals for the school trip and ended up going to China! She's been telling me so much, and I can't stop listening to her stories and descriptions. I really want to visit, if not work there. Although, I'm pretty worried about Hong Kong and the protesters there and their future. Bae told me how amazingly organized and civilized they are and patient. But all of the efforts could be for nothing in the end. China is too big and too... communist.

Each year has been getting worse, climate-wise. There was a long heat wave and massive forest fires in Siberia. Some immigrants are still trying to get in, just outside the gates. Mostly young people are left outside, perhaps younger than me, not speaking a word of English, and many of them don't seem friendly at all or desperate. Mina, that "tribal" friend of mine, said she saw Air Jordans, iPhones and braces on some of them, so I don't know what to think about all this. The government is using the AI more now, as it's been learning with reinforcement, supervision and automatically. Again, some people are afraid of it, but that's to be expected. Regardless, the bureaucracy has been 50% more efficient and faster.

Parents have been spending more time with each other like I hoped for! Only for vacations, though. But still, they had four one-month trips abroad. Via trains and buses only. Until they're 65, they need to hit 1000 working hours annually, but since their work weeks have been getting shorter, they feel they have less time for trips. But if they had worked non-stop (not on weekends, of course), they could have had one four-month-long vacation! They should ask around on their next trip to see how many people have that luxury and a choice. I had Carlo join me for several forest walks, which were surprisingly pleasant. He didn't try anything funny or pathetic, and after all our

talks on different subjects, I must say I'm so happy for him, as he seems so confident, wise and mature. He also said he wanted to try and go study abroad in Belgium, but he'll try next year probably; he thinks it will be a good year for travelling.

The person of the year was not a queen this time but a king of the pull-up bars - an impressively fit Chinese man, in his 50s probably. I saw him working out in an outdoor gym near our building, and I couldn't believe what he was doing. I wasn't the only one staring, either. He was in his "wife beater", thin-soled shoes and a Bluetooth speaker hanging on his belt, pumping out that sick traditional Chinese beatz, yo. When I heard he said he was 78 years old, shit just got real - I had to talk to him. He was a professional athlete from age four until he was 33 and had a minor injury. He was soon kicked out and felt so worthless and dispensable. After a couple of decades of surviving back in his birthplace village, he came here with his lovely wife in search of the freedom and respect he deserves.

Of course, this encounter quickly made me feel fat, lazy, ugly and worthless. But I'm getting better at blocking my ego when it starts spitting this bullshit at me. But since I was single for most of the year (not counting a "thing" or two here and there), I had plenty of time to work on myself. In fact, I worked a lot on my body, finally. Yoga at home, outdoor gyms, some cardio in between and voila! I don't see much difference when I look in the mirror, but Bea has noticed and given me compliments. I feel stronger, tighter, fitter and more ready for whatever comes. I guess that's the point. A confidence boost is a great side-effect of the process. Aesthetics are for wimps and for people who are compensating, not healing properly. That's what my coach said, at least. Yeah, she's brutal like that!

On a rainy afternoon, just before sunset and after my squelchy run, the wind started blowing suddenly, showing patches of blue skies above all that grim dreariness. After a few minutes, the most vivid rainbow appeared. But that's not "the moment" for me. I realized how, even on the cloudiest day, stuck in a hailstorm pelting down on us - just above the clouds is a perfect blue sky. All the damn time! We know this, yet never seem to notice. There are so many situations I could parallel this to, but in essence, I now understand what faith really means. I shan't forget about the everlastingly clear sky above.

## **Birthday #20**

What a strange year this was. I'll begin by saying that I've used it as a "gap year" to pull myself together because, at times, I felt like I was falling apart - too many sleepless nights, overthinking about my place in the world, my niche, and my purpose. Also, I think I'll stay away from the world news media in order to heal myself. Journalism today is a joke, honestly.

As Bea turned 20 earlier than me, she decided to move into her own apartment, and I joined her later in July. I think that truly saved me. We played a lot of video games, cooked every day, and she managed to drag me to some parties to mingle with people. I had no idea how many exciting friends she had! I also read many books, journaled (for a few months, failed), and worked out five days a week (for five months only), but most important of all - I made a bucket list. I'm not gonna share it here yet, maybe. But I will say that I want to be stronger, wiser, experienced, nicer, non-judgmental and a valuable member of the local and global society.

I decided to stop missing my nature walks so much, so this autumn, I got a (my first proper) job with local ecologists who spend lots of time there. We were regenerating the surrounding Caspian Depression, all the way to the coast, as it has lots of potential to be reversed back to how it was. I made many mistakes with the team, but I learned so much and genuinely feel I made a difference. On the way, I earned some medals, awards and decorations for working in a "critical field". Grass and trees are simple yet powerful in attracting biodiversity and stabilising ecosystem balance. The whole region will be less arid and more inviting to many species in a few years. After a decade of regeneration, it could be suitable even for food forests and full-on regenerative permaculture.

One of the ecologists I almost fell in love with. He was so smart and charismatic but seemed to be only capable of reciprocating love towards nature. He seemed full of himself, having a way too high opinion of his character, career and accomplishments. Even though he claims to be spiritual, he's basically scared of facing his fears and traumas. This was obvious to me, and I just did two semesters of Psych in high school. Most of the time, he was behaving selfishly and

somewhat narcissistically. Seems like there are only two types of people in the world – the selfish and the altruistic ones? But I wouldn't want to be binary, that sounds like something he would say. I won't even bother using his name, so obviously, that romance didn't last long enough. But like I said, mistakes are welcome because that's how I learn! Right? Riight?!! It better be so...

“Daddy Rona”, as Bae calls it, became a global pandemic. Masks are mandatory in all indoor spaces. Personally, I don't mind, as long as I can take my daily forest walks with friends and without a special breathing apparatus. Reading how it is for most people in the world... boy, I sure am glad I didn't decide to travel this year! I'm still following the HK protests and sharing their stories on my blog, but I think they will not bounce back after the pandemic (if it will ever end). It's futile. China will devour Hong Kong completely, eventually.

To facilitate the influx of Arabic people here, many people needed to move to other buildings to keep the “Proportional Neighbouring” fair. Of course, we didn't allow untested vaccines to be used on our people, even though some of them voted for them (12%). Regardless, they were not allowed to be imported. I heard some families went on vacation to get jabbed and never returned because... reasons.

Some people caught it badly - we had about 100 deaths since the start, but they were all “red-lighted” for health negligence already. That means the health system automatically picked up that they lived an unhealthy lifestyle, and they were first warned, then advised, and then they were supposed to be coached back to health but didn't make it in time. I'm so proud of Dad for getting fitter in time!

Speaking of that 50-year-old dude, he never seemed better. All the tests (both blood and quantum) came out perfect this year! The doctor said he has at least the same number of years left to go. Working on his mental health seems to have been the last piece of the wellness puzzle that he was ignoring. He and Mom spent their four months of vacation on different local farms. When we bumped into each other several times while at work, it felt weird being happy to see them! Perhaps because it's outdoors? The main thing is that they're finally enjoying their marriage together! And just to mention Carlo, he fell madly in love with some high-school girl and kinda disappeared off the face of the planet (and the internet). I hope he's okay.

## Birthday #21

It's the rush hour; the Sun has set on this late-autumn day. A young soldier in uniform hastily pushes a baby stroller while talking on a phone through a very smoggy Sarajevo downtown. I see him only quickly, passing him by in a car, so I don't know whether there is a baby in the stroller. The moment is bizarre either way...

Sarajevo is the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a small but chronically troubled country in Europe, and at the moment, one of the most polluted cities in the world. Why was I there? Well, I shall explain.

I spent the year in the Balkans, working on protecting endangered species and restoring their habitats. I was full of impressions, mostly I was impressed by: the amount of rampant deforestation, litter basically everywhere (I saw a helium sponge-bob balloon stuck in a tree canopy in the middle of a lush, wild forest), macro and micro hydro-power and African-level corruption. It's basically a catch-44, trying to get something done well or at all. Drawing on my tablet-laptop kept me from being consumed by anger, as the wildness of nature was so profoundly healing. I had a sobbing attack (those rarely happen to me) when we were in Kruševo, Macedonia. A lovely old grandpa took us to a museum to show us an old manifesto that meant a lot to him and, as he says, doesn't mean a thing to most people these days. It had, and still has, a very motivational and inspiring effect on me, mainly because of the parallels one can draw to the modern slavery, oppression, manipulation and crisis that most of the world is in, with Balkan countries holding their own fair share of that. Yet, most people just put up with it all and obey.

I could write pages and pages of the other stories I heard and people I met there... A 90+ grandma that fought in WWII was only eleven years old when she carried munition for the machine-gunners as she was one of the "trench-boys ". Most of them were boys, hence the name. Even the best history lessons don't prepare you for anything like this, especially growing up in "a utopia ", as Isataion has been affectionately called. I got the impression that there would never be peace in that region, nor unity which would lead to prosperity. People are just so afraid and passive. Scarred with injustice and stuffed with traumas. People I met were wonderful, cheerful and

welcoming, but others were frustrated, selfish and aggressive, and I mean not just to us but to each other. No one is... just content and truly happy where they are. A protest clash near a protected rainforest showed how some people can have both sides to this black & white coin. However, as soon as a peaceful protest turns violent, everything turns sour quickly for everyone involved. This happened with our pacifism and the refugee camps at our doorstep... Yet, what I find commendable and near incomprehensible, is that there are still local people volunteering there, trying to help out. Most of them don't come from wealthy families, by the way.

Thinking of Carlo, he appeared - acting all normal - like I couldn't see through his horrible acting. He tried to run away to Russia with that girl of his, he called her fiancée even! Luckily, she dumped him, and he came back to his senses. And that was just as I thought about how he's getting more mature. He was always naïve, and gullible. But this purity of his was what attracted me to him long time ago. The question is, should he grow up, get serious and lose this? Then, this purity might be irreversibly lost forever. I'm not sure whether I want to grow up in this way. I need more time to think about this, as it's a tough one for sure.

It's funny how just as I started feeling as close to Bea as to my Mom, she left me. For three years! I mean, she went to study abroad, but still, it hurts personally. It surprised all of us how much I actually cared for her! Mom was now pretty happy we got to hang out more than ever. She seems to have calmed down since she started caretaking the "yogi family" kids, as she affectionately calls them, a few years ago. One day, I was with her and the two boys on one of the farms when she casually said, "Choose carefully the people you surround yourself with." This hit me so hard and even scared me to the marrow. Because just a couple of weeks before that, during a video call with Bae, she told me the same, using almost the exact words!! I still get chills down my spine when I remember. I guess I'll take that as a direct sign to be more picky. I mention here only the closest friends of mine, but I have loads of casual friends, and with them, I wasn't so picky. I guess I was trying to be liked by all? Well, no more of that from now on! I'd rather have less quantity but more quality, any day of the week.

## Birthday #22

My legs are starting to hurt from squatting for so long. I don't want to leave this snail. I'm mesmerised by it having its lunch, munching on a leaf here before me. I had no idea their mouths looked like Gary's (from SpongeBob) and that this guy wasn't afraid of me, a giant mammal staring down at him from a great height. He (or she? Aren't they hermaphrodites?) seems trustworthy and dependable, unlike most humans. We are similar in our desire for devouring leaves, but it seems braver than me, honestly. If I was it, I would stay in my shell and probably wee in it as an annoying colossus is blocking the Sun. My Slavic/Chinese squatting stamina is betraying me. I have to go on and return the tools that my dad rented from the store.

I guess that counts as both a picturesque moment and an interesting stranger I met. I named it Nicola, by the way. Anyway, there were some new creatures with limbs in my life this year. I had a six-month semi-pro relationship with a semi-esports player. I must say that he mostly changed my perspective about games and gamers. All his friends I met seemed very nice, funny, gentle and honest. It mainly ended because he was so busy working as a tester and trying to compete online, always living in different time zones. Another big reason was, for me at least, that he has a porn addiction. I don't mind watching it sometimes, but that's when I'm single for too long. But he was doing it the whole time and saw nothing wrong with it all. I just couldn't accept that. For a while, he even had me thinking about whether I'm boring, prude or jealous, but I'm not. It's just wrong to me. I tried talking about it with several friends, but only Bea understood. It seems like it's a serious, global phenomenon.

I met this guy because we were working on the same team on a new game developed locally! This, in turn, made me into a gamer myself! I'm still exploring all the different genres, but since my job was about lighting, colour corrections and photography, I focused on checking out mostly aesthetically pleasing games. I was working on a delivery racing game based on a lively island. You start with bikes at first and slowly move on to off-roaders/trucks and eventually onto trucks/lorries. It's mostly played with a joypad controller, but the physics will be pretty realistic, so testing with steering wheels and

pedals is needed and... guess who I found out is involved as a tester? Dad is! He's spent most of the last few months on the fifth-floor hallway (where the sim-rigs are) rather than at home. I must admit, I'm quite impressed with his skills. I guess this game will be more popular with this kind of hard-core, old-school player like he most definitely is. I'm excited to try it out!

Dad has been getting kinder each year. I must remember to praise him more often. Mom seems to have followed suit; she's been broadening her friends' circle, but unlike Dad, spending a lot of time outdoors, I've never seen her this tanned before. Dad always told her she's a hot mom, and now she looks like one - baking hot. This year, she changed a couple of jobs, I think. One was on the farms, and the other... ghostwriting? Doesn't matter; if I had written about her odd jobs every year, I wouldn't have any space left for my own life entries! What's important is that they are both living a healthy life and working about 5 hours daily. We have actually stopped worrying about each other. I thought something like that would never ever happen in this universe. Bea is doing great at her Uni (she's studying to become a dietitian), but I wish we talked more often. I don't think she was busier than me this year, or perhaps that's just my ego's perspective... I still get tricked by it so quickly.

Globally speaking, this year hasn't been so peachy. While doing research for my blogging, it was distressing to see what the richest 1% are doing with the help of mass media. Talks about "Climate debt" are just for show. Money needs to go back where it came from! It seems there might be mass protests happening soon in the US about the "wealth gap" and the chronic injustices. Let's see how it goes.

However, the weather isn't getting better. For example, harvests in Scandinavia, the UK, Central Plains and Dinaric Alps are getting lower, even though they use chemical fertilisers and pesticides. But now there is a proper conflict, a war in Ukraine, as the media are madder than ever. Freedom of speech is entirely oppressed! Fake news is everywhere; however, "free news" movements arise slowly, and more brave whistle-blowers are coming out with the truth. Many Western governments use this commotion with the "pandemic" and now the war to pass laws that directly oppose liberty. The right to protest might be abolished if this trend doesn't get stopped.

## Birthday #23

I moved to another part of the city, further from the centre, but after a few months, I still wasn't happy with the location. I need to wait a few more days, and I'll be able to apply for another move. This building's shared PCs aren't good enough for me to test the game I'm working on, so Dad helped me build a killer AIO for myself, using all kinds of hardware - he's like Frankenstein when it comes to repurposing things. I admire people who can take something useless or something most think won't fit, and make it fit, make it all work somehow. I've been enjoying the game too much, actually! I thought I was not a fan of racing games, but the physics and the realism of this one are excellent, and the visual atmosphere is extraordinary. I'm totally not biased, no sir, not one bit!

The public buying the game was praising the visuals, and one of the user's comments made me tear up. I felt so proud and acknowledged. While some people loved the game to bits (and bytes), many found it impossibly frustrating since there's no going back. On hard mode, if you crash your vehicle, you're out, and if you get injured in an accident, you'll miss out on the online tasks until you're healed. Anyway, I got invited to work on the next part! I'll start in a month or so, being in charge of the "visual atmosphere", and when Dad heard this, he flipped! He seems more excited about the next game than me! He does know he'll contribute to that one as well.

Dad has been helping Mom more with... I guess one could say optimism. He's not an optimist, but since she's still pessimistic, he's there trying to bring her back to the golden mean - realism. I guess that's something we all have in this family; perhaps it's in our DNA? There's plenty of emotional baggage that just gets thrown around and passed down the generations. Someone, eventually, has to deal with it and sort it out. I don't know if it is from early childhood, the womb or just something karmic.

To go back to the topic of hardware, Dad told me how our refurbishing/recycling factories have struggled over the past few years with the newer electronics; they're almost impossible to repair. From next year, we'll start producing our own in a rightly sustainable way. First for us, then maybe for export. There are already a few

models announced - three laptop-tablet hybrids of different sizes, all upgradable like our phones. Crazy how there is no one else doing that anywhere else. That was the missing link since our OS is working (almost) flawlessly. I remember hating it when it came out, all glitchy and buggy, but anything can be polished with time.

AI is rapidly getting smarter and more useful, especially at farms with weather predictions, watering, planning, tracking, diagnostics, etc. But still, most people do the work themselves. Only the heavy and risky tasks are left for the robots. As almost half of our population is over 50, I think that's a good idea, older people should be busy, but with light work. And most people give in more than the required one weekly hour of labour, anyway. Even though we are at full capacity (almost half a million citizens in total), the city seems less full as more people are spending time at the Periphery.

Bae and I have been regular with our video calls, or as she calls them, reports. I miss her so much! She couldn't find time to come this year either... I'm glad I didn't go to a university abroad. It seems like a waste of time. Unless one goes for fun and making friends. Unless it's the US and your family are millionaires. Unless, unless... My other best friend that is worth a mention – Carlo – has been around this year, finally. He fell in love again a couple of months ago, but this time with a much older girl (woman?). But, since she seems nice, I'll approve it this time. I need to keep an eye on the people he attracts.

Globally, things have been heating up. More much-needed light is being shed on the so-called “conspiracy theories” and proving many to be true. Of course, most people are still hypnotised, but the fact of the matter is that an increasing number of people are realising that they're being lied to and used. Mass media is still trying hard to force the old narrative and spread lies and misinformation. But when a hundred people own more wealth than four billion people do, something needs to be changed.

There were some protests across Europe, even in Russia too. The money being used up on military expenditure, along with the fossil fuel industry subsidies, is promised to be diverted to good use. The good (read: disobedient) citizens are becoming aware of their role in democracies and putting much more pressure on their governments, as they should have been doing from day one.

## Birthday #24

It's hard being a climate optimist. I might be repeating myself, but THIS year's weather was the worst so far, locally and globally. Spring came and went three times; summer was sweltering and dry, and now it's snowing outside like we're on the Caucasus. Similarly, Isataion has become notorious for having many internet activists and donors here, so it is now drawing the attention of a different kind.

I read that we were negotiating with Libya to host the next experimental city, but it didn't pan out. Primarily due to the greed of the current government there, which has been poor ever since it became "democratised". The "Wealth Gap" protests have been joined by the radical "Eat the Rich" movement, and I'm afraid they won't continue to be non-violent like they managed to be so far. Even so, the response of some governments and their police have been so bloody brutal and unnecessary that I can understand why people protect themselves by arming themselves. It doesn't look like another Hong Kong protest; this one is not David versus Goliath.

I spent many hours talking to a new online friend from Hong Kong; he's one of the organisers. He's young, determined and brave! However, he's a realist. He applied for UK citizenship since he thinks it's just a matter of time before communism replaces democracy there. I realised I'm into Asian guys and noticed I developed a crush on Jack (his English name). I have no idea what to do with those feelings and where they'll lead. Most of the time, I worry about what might happen to him since each organiser has been getting caught over the past few weeks and disappearing without a trace... So many emotions this year... Mom reminded me of Doug, and then I wanted to try to rescue a dog again, but the cons list of having a pet was much bigger than the pros. One is that, today, I'd have to move to the farms for that, and I don't think I'm ready still. I got into a different apartment again this year, which worked out great. Besides, my desire for nature has been quenched by camping twice a month on the farms, sometimes for two nights, when it's not too cold or hot.

However, Bea is finally back!!! I never missed anyone so much in my whole life! I never hugged anyone so powerfully or was hugged by someone like that, haha! It wasn't planned, but I was single this year,

so I got more quality time with her, and even though we chatted a lot last year, we had some catching-up to do – nothing beats flesh-to-flesh communication with a pure, genuine connection. I noticed immediately how changed she is, having very low energy and, I must say - too chunky! I don't personally mind that, but she's always been athletic. She said she had never cooked less, and I guess that's sufficient proof of the change. We played too much with video games (I feel that's mostly her doing), but next year, I'll pull us outdoors more, I must. Mom actually started hanging out with Bae all of a sudden, and I must say I'm quite weirded out by that, but since they both seem happier, I guess I should accept it.

City news! Our transportation has been fully electrified finally - bikes, cars, buses, trucks and other heavy equipment. The only privately owned vehicle is the electrified kick-scooter, but that's also a one-year lease. At the June festival, it was announced that we have slowly started building our own taxis, which are entirely driverless. The old ones are being donated to the least-EV-friendly country, fittingly, I think. Dad would've been so worried about this since he loves driving (and he had driven people around as a part-time job); however, he's been driving in the simulators, so he doesn't miss the feeling.

Dad's been driving the second game that just came out as a beta, with stunning photography and visuals, cough, cough, humble. This one has already gotten a cult following, even though it's a more serious game. It's a proper car racing simulator; no bikes, SUVs or trucks. The updates for the first game have been very well received since we actually acknowledged the feedback. We've allowed modding as well.

I just decided to add this – deep down, I'm worried about Bea and our friendship. Since she came back, we have never had so many clashes as we do now. We make up the same day, of course, but still, she's been very difficult, and I've been very reactive to her newfound bullshit. I'm still unable to get her to the outdoors. She's so lethargic and dislikes the things we both used to like doing... I don't mind doing them myself, like going for a morning walk/run, but knowing that she's just oversleeping back home and stealthily grabbing some peanut butter before breakfast... I feel like she needs help before my BAE becomes a very different Bea.

## Birthday #25

Bea is an addict! Since I ended the last year with her, this one I'm starting with her. What I mean is that she exhibits all the behaviour of a drug addict. Game time is at the top of her priority list, even higher than eating and sleeping. Let alone time for love. Well, she's in love with a game. I should be more upset, but the fact that it's "my" game eases the pain inflicted onto my heart. She's been rather good at the first one, I must admit. The second one is fully out and about, but that one is Dad's first love. Not my mother - his wife, but a game is. What have I done? I'm the one who recommended the games to them... I was supposed to help out on the third game, which is in development, and it seems the programmers are swimming into deep, uncharted waters. Looks like it will be heavily delayed since it's both an FPS and an RTS with massive levels and maps, but the (amazing) storyline is already completed, even down to all of the script dialogues.

Anyway, Bae is getting even chunkier! But then again, she carries it well on her figure, although she might be going towards the chubby category. I've always remembered her as the tight, sporty, outdoorsy type. Just a few years abroad destroyed her habits... Dad's been slowing down with his volleyball while spending more time sitting. He even got "yellow lighted" from the monitoring A.I., so it's not just me or Mom telling him this. Bizarrely, he and Bea are in the same racing team, becoming fast friends! Mom is as baffled about this as I am, as she also recently became close to her. I mean, that's all great, but life's changes sometimes are happening too quickly, and this river of life we're all on takes some totally unexpected turns, and one has no clue where it leads to - to another set of white-water rapids or will it meander into a big, still-water pond? Feeling guilty is the only problem. At least Mom is doing great, especially after she read and got super-inspired by Benjamin Franklin's autobiography, doing his daily routine for almost seven months now. I admire her altruism and motivation to be a good and helpful person. As soon as I unconfuse myself these days, I'd want to be like that too!

That is precisely why I started following The Kvorum more daily. I've been more involved with what the Council is doing, their advisers advising, and everyone else debating on the plans for future projects

and changes. I had no idea how transparent everything was, maybe even too much for me. Since I've turned twenty, I could've even applied for a one-year term, through sortition, but I completely forgot that. Maybe I'll try next year, even though I don't have a specialization per se, just courses and enthusiasm. However, I was busy this year with pottery. Yes - clumsy me and fragile ceramics! I surprised myself with how quickly I learnt all the basics, but I wasn't amazed by how much fun it was – because I knew it would be loads of fun! For the last few months, I have been busy with restorations, especially of the broken or cracked ones we import. I knew Dad would enjoy restoring things, but getting his sweaty butt out of that racing seat has been impossible.

The city is feeling full by now, on top of the fact that I'm becoming more inclined toward living in a small town. I'm glad we got many North-African refugees, but there's no more space. I am getting worried again about the climate and everyone's future because this summer's Arctic ice was the smallest in area and thickness since we probably left Africa. The PPMs are still increasing (up to 458 this last week), and the governments are not doing nearly enough. Increasing taxes doesn't work on its own. However, people are trying, and I don't only mean regarding their personal carbon footprints but when it comes to protesting and demanding representation. There have even been violent clashes in corrupt developing countries, which I was trying to cover in detail on my socials. I had a feeling it would come to this, as the companies and conglomerates have become too powerful. All the while, Isataion is nearing carbon-zero status; we have opened another maglev train to the Black Sea (which I used in September), and our government has been updating our constitution again. They are now writing a "Modular Systemic Framework", which can be used by the newly reformed governments, so the same mistakes are not repeated again and again. At least the borders have been slowly opening more globally.

There's something that worries me more than everything, and I didn't want to write about it, but I can't ignore it. Every day I think about him... Jack has gone into hiding. I just saw that I wrote how worried I was last year, and I don't know what to think. Is he really safe, or was he abducted and tortured somewhere? Or even killed?!

## Birthday #26

Should I start with the good news or the bad news? What is the meaning of good and bad to different people anyway? Does it matter how we label perceived matter? There are just different events happening throughout, some are easy, and some are difficult, but even those adjectives are subjective and vary widely from person to person... But enough of philosophy for now, since I could write about my love for wisdom until the end of... (p)ages.

Globally, farmed honeybees are now critically endangered, and almost all countries have to manually pollinate their crops and flowers. However, the constant pressure build-up in the USA had become critical and exploded into something I could only describe as a civil war. For six months, anarchy reigned, and many lives have been lost. Too many armed citizens... Luckily, large numbers of soldiers and police officers disobeyed orders, and now, after the dust (and blood) has settled, it seems like the new government will be formed soon.

Nevertheless, some people are not happy with the progress being made. They feel the future is still hopeless with all the greenwashing and false promises of big companies. Thus, on one cloudy autumn afternoon, one of our citizens, a lovely girl named Jill, decided to record herself with a drone as she set herself on fire and jumped off the Pagoda. She was somewhat famous, at least here, with her wildly imaginative, refreshing vlogs, but with very serious topics. She didn't announce the self-immolation, just that she'll do an ironic live stream on "Thanksgiving" Day. Mom and I have been seriously affected by this - she even watched it happen live! Recently, I noticed she's been bouncing back with Dad's help, his long walks and his cringy jokes. But I need some more time to process this... shattering of a utopian dream I've had. I can't help but be hopeful, still. I've been hoping that we here can set the best possible example to the rest of the world, but things like this happen here as well, and they have been, just not as often as in other places. I just talked to Mom this morning about how we both feel like we should spend more time outside the city, closer to nature, as that might help us.

In April, Bae and I got shit-scared when the doctor found "a growth" in one of her breasts. I still vividly remember the chills running down

my back, arms and legs, like an arctic wind of death sweeping over me out of nowhere. However, after a few more tests, she was told it was benign and could pass on its own. So, Bea took all this as a warning and immediately got restored to factory settings, to her old self that we all know and love so much. She started eating better, working out, and gaming less and became so positively energized she even got me to try a local dating app. I saw nothing interesting, so instead, I ended up reading 23 books this year. Mostly on history since I rediscovered my love for it (and my amount of sheer ignorance) while working on restorations of Russian antiques and even ancient artefacts from the Altay region. Boys aren't going anywhere, and honestly, I got so scared that my Bae might just disappear one day. The last test she did a couple of weeks ago, which turned out alright, but we're still not sure whether it was caused by something physical, emotional or... karmic. The domino effect of this significant change was that now Dad got off his ass finally, going cycling with her almost every day. It was also out of comradery as he was sad not seeing her as often with the racing team. When I would join them for a ride or a walk, I would honestly regret it in about ten minutes. They just want to talk about cars, tracks, setups and *strats*, whatever those are. Thus, I let them be, by being happy and healthy together.

I just remembered what Bea told me a few months ago, looking at me and my history books, sabotaging my own dates. She said I'm being a "soldier's wife". Just now, I realized what she meant. She said that because of Jack and my feelings about him. I told her everything, but of course, I never told him. And since July, I've regretted not being open with him when I had the chance. He had been hiding for a long time, and as soon as he started posting videos, the mainland undercover police broke into his apartment and took him away, brutally, of course, during his last appearance. Until today, no one can tell me anything... so I'm again back in that same dark place.

At least the games are doing well. So much so that we needed to add many more servers – lobbies were full for both of the games. The third one is finally completed, but of course, still in beta testing, and this time, the testing seems like it will take forever. Designing post-apocalyptic landscapes actually soothed me for most of the time. I guess it perfectly matched the doomy melancholy of my heart?

## **Birthday #27**

This year was no joke! In March, there was another virus outbreak, spreading globally like wildfire, yet within three months, vaccines were available, on the black market, at extreme prices! This virus targeted the youngest and the oldest, with a higher death-to-case ratio than the previous ones, yet oddly, pregnant women were immune. After a documentation leak pointing to a major US pharmaceutical company engineering it and spreading it across major airports, the protests that were still going on got fuelled massively. The people were livid and weren't pacifist one bit, burning (and looting) pharmacies.

Luckily, only a few of our citizens were abroad then, and they were told to stay out until it was safe to return. There was some outrage back home, but the voting polls showed less than ten per cent of people wanting them back, and both the council and the AI voted unanimously for them to stay out. Those unfortunate folks were sent money to sustain themselves, far from the crowds, until they came back last month, alive and well. They spent most of their time living in various off-grid communities and permacultural villages. I got a lot of angry comments when I covered their story on my channels, all from people outside of our Isataion, of course. Our chat app had so many hacking attempts this year, but luckily it held on strong. Whoever used the regular, popular ones got their information stolen, even breaching our OS. From then on, the OS has been getting weekly security updates; let's hope that doesn't happen again. The council openly urged everyone here not to get involved in cyber-warfare with other nations or companies; however, they didn't say anything about punishments. Most people know that this place is a haven for outcasts, programmers and alternative people who got badly treated in their home countries.

Just before the pandemic, we finally released our third game. Aside from being technically demanding, it was exceptionally well designed psychologically. When I started playing, I thought it was just another shooter, but then it catches you, sucks you into the story, and spits you out a different person at the end of it all. You can genuinely get converted into a better person. It shows what the big companies and governments have been doing and are planning to do with us pawns.

It's easy to imagine a game like this created a small cult following quickly, and just when the pandemic got rolling, servers, which were full, started getting emptied. People began to flock to the streets and join the protesters. That major document leak was actually made by one guy who was a big fan of the game! I'm so glad I played a small part in all these global changes. Also, a couple of our local gamers have made it into the top 100 world streamers!

I did an entire course in marine ecology, but the practical part had to be cancelled due to the pandemic and the chaos that ensued afterwards. At least I got to meet some fascinating experts in the field and learn so much from them! I had yet to learn one of the most successful Norwegian seaweed companies is partly owned by us! That seaweed from the store is theirs, and our algal plastics are designed here using their materials.

Mom's really resilient and stronK! She's fully recovered after the incident last year, with the help of psychotherapists, of course, but I also had help and don't think I'm back to "normal" yet... "Losing" Jack doesn't help either, even though I could see that coming, and he could see that coming for him. I check and ask around regularly, hoping he'll pop up somewhere, but nothing yet.

Most of the events, parties and workshops I attended this year were on the Periphery, not in the city – I think that's a first for me! I guess I'm subconsciously getting ready to move out? Maybe not yet, but soon enough, I'll summon the courage. I'm sure life will present me with an unlocked proverbial door somewhere. I'll have to decide whether to open it and walk through it or not.

Oh yes, I just have to share one story for the end – One of Dad's online racing teammates has been suffering from depression (even trying suicide), and she confided in him first. Having a very tough and unfair life, being only 14 years old, yet being skilled, talented and passionate in racing. He says she makes the best setups. He tried helping her himself, but he decided it would be best to make her story public. And it became much more than that, so viral that the top IRL racers shared it and talked about her life. She was understandably distraught, but since she managed to remain anonymous and many more people started talking about bad parenting, bad teachers and mental health - she forgave him.

## Birthday #28

People are as mad as hell, and they're not going to take this anymore, it seems. I got to see this anger first-hand in Hong Kong and Macao when I worked in China this year alone. I was officially visiting (for six months), but I had to go to China first and then to the territories. There is a massive divide between the overly-developed business downtown areas with dozens of massive glass skyscrapers and the 19th-century rural areas and numerous factories, with apartment blocks straight from the early Cold War era. My original plan was also going to Xinjiang and Tibet, but it was almost impossible for foreigners as I didn't get the permits. Still, it was a fantastic opportunity to explore such a place alone.

At times, I felt like an alien landing on another planet. Some people there were acting similarly to the Chinese people that live in Isataion, but most of them seemed strange to me, as I did to them. Especially the rural peasants and the city's "migrant workers". I had never felt stares like that. At times I felt preyed upon, just by their intense gaze upon my pale flesh! However, there's no expressed anger, just suppressed one. The protesters gave up long ago. Half of them disappeared, like Jack, and the other half were scared to bits, staying at home. Even VPNs are hacked. People tried their best, and they lost. Those who can, have emigrated already, mainly to the UK.

I met up with a DW journalist working undercover in China, in Guangdong province. He was uncovering the African drug business but, by accident, uncovered the Falun Gong organ harvesting, wealthy parents playing with their babies' DNA on the black market and the teenage suicide epidemic. I learnt a lot from him; he's inspired me profoundly. Whenever I get stuck in my writing, I think of him and instantly get motivated to keep going. I'm unsure how helpful my work there was, but I gained valuable skills and insight. I was helping some gamers get documents for emigration, and one gave me something back in return. Hope! This short, chubby, and squeaky bunch of laughter, jokes and pure passion told me about a "re-education camp" in Tibet where he knows many of the HK protests' organisers had been taken to. I hope I get another chance to visit China and maybe get to Tibet through Nepal or Bhutan.

Mom was busy helping local oldies for the whole year, and Dad was busy, mostly being famous. They, in fact, got interviewed! Since Dad didn't hide his identity in the SimGirl story, and she did, he's a celebrity in the Sim community, which is growing daily (but still small compared to other genres). He even had a few commentary gigs, covering some of the biggest championships with the second game. All of this is slightly annoying me because Dad's always been one of those sour losers that are also sour winners. He likes to rub everything in! But Mom's so happy with him; he's becoming a better and kinder person; she even said so in the interview, which was really sweet of her. She's also been working on herself, so their progress is easily noticed. Only small bits of egoistic, patriarchal bullshit are left in him, and I'm sure it won't last much longer; his Yin is steadily catching up with his Yang, hehe!

After I came back in September, Dad and I went to workshops together. I mean, we just walked to the Pine Pagoda together; he went to restore his electronics and small machines; I went to my pottery and wooden furniture! Working with one's hands seems to be so innately designed into all of us. Gender, age, background... none of it matters. Once you find something to get busy with, an ancestral superpower arises from the sleepy depths of your being.

Maybe that is why global protests have been gaining momentum; people were aching to get their lives back into their hands. Decision-making has been taken from them as democracy, as it were, is a scam. True democracy has been stolen from people a long time ago. Even original communist ideas were good, but they got stolen as well. Because they failed in practice, it doesn't mean we should give up on the idea. Just like in a restaurant, it's great to have many options to choose from.

We can modify, combine, subtract and get something that works for us here and now. Later, we can update it. This is what's been going on all over the world. It all started with civil disobedience and this year... People have been shutting down rocket launches with billionaires in them, trying for the ultimate escape, haha! Few big lawsuits have been accomplished successfully against the "big pharma" and "big oil". There's a lot to solve still, but it's a helluva beginning - of the end of an era.

## Birthday #29

Indian monsoon started to shift as predicted by scientific reports decades ago. “Zombie fires” keep burning for longer and in more locations. Not to mention the increasing frequency and intensity of storms. But we all knew that would happen, didn't we? At least we that cared, read, learnt and thought for ourselves, questioning the reality that was served to us by the news agencies. Although some that since have gained political power, after the reformatations, have already started bickering among each other. I'm talking about the new Canadian government. There's so much that needs to be dealt with, yet people are being petty and egoistic.

Animal testing is still allowed in most countries, even though it's been repeatedly proven how pointless, useless and obsolete it is. We, in Isataion, even stopped many trials on humans when medicine or a new procedure came to that stage. This has actually slowed down our scientific progress overall. Most people argue that we went too far with it and that preventive medicine is our strength, with 97% of our population being healthier than the healthiest individuals in “the West”. I don't know how I feel about all that. I voted yes for testing, but now, two months later, I feel differently.

Alas, I digress because I'm under a lot of stress and in desperate need of some gentle caress. That's a tangent on top of a digression, for your information! I'll come back to myself after I'm done with others. First - Dad! I felt terrible thinking he was enjoying popularity and selfishly helping SimGirl become famous. I know I was very wrong and that Mom was right all along. I'll stop with the rhymes. Before I commit some rap crimes.

SimGirl revealed her identity when she got offered to become a real-life racing driver in one of the top teams in her country (Ireland), so she promptly ran away from home. Since she was still underage, a team of lawyers, who were her fans, helped her find a clause somewhere and used her video recordings of her dad verbally abusing her and her mom so she escaped. I heard that her dad was caught by one of the neighbours assaulting her mom, and now her dad is famous, but not in a good way, as his worthless, cowardly, abusive ass is in prison. Thus, my Dad can now enjoy the lack of popularity

since almost everyone has forgotten about him, and he can return to the sidelines. That's how internet fame works. Bae has been hanging out with Carlo, which I'm so happy and surprised about. I didn't do anything to make that happen! But whenever I tried before, they got bad vibes from each other. By now, Bea is back in good health and shape with her sports and dancing, and Carlo seems "swole" for the first time ever! He got a personal trainer, but he didn't tell me why. It seems everyone is getting into shape except me. Over these past years, I only got some blobby shapes going on.

As for myself, I was working all year with different journalists on post-WWII-China scripts for a documentary series, doing a lot of research online, however... I went to China! This time, I went to Nepal and snuck into Tibet, like I wanted to do the last time I was there. Sherpa father and son guides were taking care of me the whole time. They were intrigued by my story of Jack and impressed by how small my backpack was. They jokingly said I was the first foreigner that carried their own shit for a change. They told me so much about the Himalaya peaks' tourism frenzy, with the corresponding tons of waste that's been increasing year after year.

They led me to a "detention camp" where I heard that Jack might be held. When we saw the armed security and cameras, they tried persuading me to give up. After lunch, I snuck away while my guides were napping and got into a fight with the two guards. I'm not sure whether fortune favours the brave or the dumb, but there were two monks nearby that managed to talk the guys out of beating me to death. I lost two teeth and all hope of ever seeing Jack. I don't know which one hurt me more. When I returned here, I got my teeth fixed, but thinking of him still hurts. Bloody pointless!

After that ill-advised near-death experience, all six of us went to a Buddhist monastery, where I stayed for two months! My Sherpa friends left after a week and came back to lead me back to Nepal. I am still in contact with them. The profound experience there soothed me physically and mentally, starting a kind of awakening. Meditating has never been the same afterwards. I still feel connected to the monks I lived with and can sense their support. Even though I asked them not to, I feel they are praying for me sometimes. I think of them often and send them my own prayers.

## **Birthday #30**

After telling stories from China to my parents, we decided to challenge each other, to try and see if and how long we can live according to the “Noble eightfold path”. This meant a lot of yoga, meditation, journaling and altruistic work. I wasn’t so busy this year, working part-time with photography, pottery and ecology, so I had no excuses. My ego had loads of them, but I decided not to give in to the shifty “Resistance” BS. I also published all my poetry online.

Mom has dug deep into the challenge, but I’m unsurprised since she was already going in this direction over the past years. She even got her friends into it. However, I am surprised by Dad. He also was changing over the past few years, but slowly. He’s diligent and does a lot of research thoroughly before embarking on anything. There were so many moments when he left me with my jaw open, staring at him, blown away by his wisdom, kindness and serenity. Again, this old man is proving me wrong! It’s harder for me to drop my judgments and expectations of him than it is for him to drop his patriarchal upbringing.

I really need to get rid of these... They’ve been holding me back all these years! I could’ve done much more and better if I had just let go of my tight grip on the predictions of the future that I thought I deserved. Now, sitting here at this desk feels like I’m only just starting this laborious yet rewarding journey of my self-discovery.

Beatrice joined for a bit and gave up. I mean, what to expect from her? She’s always been like this, never completing anything, yet always starting everything. I tried motivating her, but it didn’t do a damn thing. Maybe I could have more influence if I went back to living with her. Now, I’ve been living with my parents for almost a year. I’ll try to survive for one more month. We spent the winter in a flat; spring on a farm; summer on three separate farms; autumn together on another farm, and this winter, we’re back in a flat. I was shocked by how not even for once, I felt like it was wrong for me (being thirty today) to live together with them. Perhaps, it’s because I know I can just move out whenever I want. And that I should do soon while living with a boyfriend in a “normal” relationship. That implies that I should at least TRY to get one first. I haven’t been serious about any guy so

far, and I felt occasional short relationships were satisfactory, but I'm missing out on something valuable. Not on being a mother, as that's something I'm not interested in, and I don't think I ever have been.

Some non-personal stuff again! Due to colossal droughts, floods and predictably unpredictable weather spells, we had rationing this year on fresh produce. But we have plenty of persevered food in storage, probably for half of Kazakhstan. Cycling is now allowed on the boulevards. We've been slowly decreasing the number of taxis, selling and donating some of them over the past years. Winter cycling is going to be even more accessible and safer. I remember being a kid and wanting to do it, but my parents were against it. Now, we're all doing it for most of the winter.

As I mentioned a lack of medicinal progress last year, this year it has been voted that R&D on CRISPR should be halted due to the unpredictability of the research outcomes and, of course, the still unknown side effects. Yet, the rest of the world is far ahead of us. Therefore, I can now say that sometimes, it's good to be missing out. It's also good to miss out on being plugged into virtual, augmented realities through the latest gadgets from the best brands in the market. Seems like more and more people, young and old, are getting depersonalised like that.

In the southern hemisphere, changing Ill Nino's effects have been intense in South America, Oceania and Indonesia. The only good thing about people getting displaced, hurt and even killed is that there is bound to be a change happening because (most) people need to become desperate in order to seek justice and create better lives for themselves. Big social networks are not helping; they spread hatred and misinformation. They still have power over the ignorant masses. Better laws must be passed to reign them in! The companies, I mean, the masses have been reigned in for long enough.

People have been unionising and creating powerful syndicates, which gives me hope. Decentralisation is needed the most, regardless of how good a constitution is. Isn't it utter madness to have a judge in a very powerful position for 30+ years? No one can handle that and remain incorruptible. Co-ownership of the companies is another step in the right direction. Some are against it, but those are the people that still have the "Red Scare", 80 years onwards.

## Birthday #31

Let's start one entry with Dad. As he feels he'll be too old "later" to travel for work, he decided to do it ASAP, so this year, he worked in the Gulf region, mainly UAE. He was part of a big team converting classic and old-school sports cars into EVs – basically the perfect job for him! He returned feeling so great about himself and his work there and is willing to travel some more next year. However, he wasn't so happy with life there, not just because of the crazy hot and humid weather and the fact that everything is artificial and imported, but also because of... well, modern-day slavery. I remember learning about it in school, but the details he provided us and the horror stories he told us... And many of the guys who lived there for years said that today is much better than it was five or ten years ago. Most of these unfortunate people come from the "downtrodden, slave nations" (those are Dad's words), which are India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Philippines mostly. Most of those workers were so lovely and kind. Yet, most had their passports taken and were given miserable salaries while working the whole summer outside and living in horrifying conditions. He brought lots of photos, and I posted them all over social media and my journalist blog/vlog.

On a 60 degrees Celsius August day (even though officially it's reported to be 45 degrees because of the labour policies) waiting at the traffic lights in a brand-new, company-provided, air-conditioned, white Land Cruiser Prado, there's no hint of the sweltering outdoors. But just then a big, noisy, tipper lorry stops in a line next to the car. In the back, at least fifty construction workers are being transported to work. Their worn-out skin is burnt by a thousand suns, with a facial expression that says, "I don't know how much longer I can take this". Almost all of them look too skinny to be employed in heavy outdoor physical work. You don't see any pale-skinned people among them. They're being taken away to finish building an opulent indoor ski-slope theme park for more Very Important People to have fun in. How's that for a fucking picturesque moment?

These are the people that built everything there! Yet, in most companies, you'll see Westerners in higher-management positions. I've always tried to avoid explicit moments in this diary of mine, and I

will not mention what the locals do to the Filipino nannies that care for many Arab's incestuous and hopelessly spoiled children. Some of the videos can be found online, anyway. I hope to go there next year and make a documentary with my DW mentor. Mom, Bae and I shed many a tear together, listening to Dad's experiences and looking at his photos. We're all one-third into the 21st century, yet we still allow these inhumane things to happen, just not as openly as it used to be done...

Back here at home, we had more rationing than last summer, but we're told we still have plenty of stored supplies. I'm sick of having pickled cabbage in June and fruit jam in July. Yes, I know I shouldn't complain, as most countries, including some European ones, are way worse off than us. Our ecosystems try to balance themselves, but our food gets sick, wilted or eaten. I got depressed this spring when the official climate report came in when we reached the 1.5 warming, with 500 PPMs already. Scientists have never been more pessimistic, it seems. I had these moments before, but I would refocus quickly. This time, it took me a good month and a crappy superficial relationship (with a guy who doesn't deserve to be even mentioned) to pull myself together. Russian reports on the Siberian permafrost have been getting grimmer with each passing year. Yet, somehow, there are still some scientists that can be lobbied and bought to spread lies and misinformation.

Lobbying is made illegal in only a couple of countries, but "Big Pharma" is crumbling, medicine has never been cheaper, and this is noticed the most in the "global south". I don't want to think egoistically about how I should've just lived a hedonistic lifestyle somewhere else and fattened my ass up before we ran out of water or died out of cancer. I can help out, even by a thousand of a degree. There is good news, of course; there always has been. One just needs to shift one's focus and notice it. Otherwise, it's really easy to slip and slide down the slippery slope of despair. Therefore, I walked the other day – or was guided there - to the tree where I kissed Carlo for the first time. It's so tall and strong now! The branches are thicker than some trees! It felt huge 25 years ago, but that's because I was a wee sapling myself. As long as trees sprout from the soil and keep growing closer to the clouds, I know we'll make it somehow.

## Birthday #32

I almost didn't go to the Gulf. I managed to only get a visa for UAE, which was enough to confirm all the Dad's stories and to write new ones. I almost didn't go because just a week before my planned departure, I got so scared since my DW friend said he won't be able to make it, and I'll have to take charge of his team and do the already planned recordings. Thus, I promptly discovered I had the "imposter syndrome". I never went to Uni for journalism (or at all), and I only took the course in the final grade of high school. I read books and watched movies on the subject, of course, and I did a so-called master class online. I felt like that, with some experience from China, and my blogging/vlogging won't be enough. If the audience would hate the movie, I would let everyone down.

Of course, none of that happened, but for that week, I was living in agony. Terrified and living in the future, that would've never happened. I lost a week of my life, many sleepless nights and my physical and mental health declined over something that never would've happened. So, returning to good ol' Buddhism and Stoicism helped me return to the present, thankfully.

We recorded so much material that the editing team back in Germany was trimming it for days and days. Only five per cent of it was enough for a 45-minute program. Interviews with the nannies were so disturbing. The stories they told us - contrasted with the loveliness and purity of these young girls in such a painful way. One starts to think how there is still a primordial and bestial nature as one human assumes the prey role and the other the predator. Making oneself a target is not even needed, but it does make it much easier to be abused. The saddest thing I also mentioned in my last entry is how all the interviewees are saying how much better it is today compared to ten years ago. I searched for videos and books on this topic from before, and they're getting harder to find. It seems that everything is being censored by the government, which is not run by the local Arab families as it looks to the world, but by some capitalist neo-colonist bastards from the "developed nations".

At first, I thought it was just me, attracting negative things, people and news towards myself, but now I see this year was very dark for

everyone. Can we escape our own extinction? The one that we posed to ourselves in our greed and ignorance... The protests have been dialling down as more people got complacent (or just tired from fighting), even though we had the longest, coldest winter in recorded history with the thickest snow cover, especially in the places that were always wintery (although this one is very late). On one side, I'm afraid the powerful will use this time of despair to strike back, as there are still many holes in the new systems of governing people, especially in the economy. Most people aren't still used to living simply now, with rationing and self-control, and those are the people who could change sides easily when a 21st-century Adolf appears and lures them in with promises of forgotten glory and luxury. However, on the other side, kids love the winter! They made lemonade from the proverbial lemons they got, and they frickin' enjoyed themselves! The youth, in general, and throughout history, were the ones leading the betterment of society as the old traditional people died off. But let's see what the new spring brings.

I must be realistic and admit how my loved ones are amazing against all odds. Dad has been so helpful and confident to ask to be in the movie. He has finally set his priorities straight and helped me set mine. I must put myself first at all times, but not in a selfish way. It's paradoxical, but I get it now. Once I'm a better "version" of myself, I can better help others - it's as simple as that.

Mom has been very quiet these past couple of years but in a calm, observant way. Seems like that challenge worked out for her as well! It was a shame it didn't do much for me, but it did help overall. Bae has been angry with everyone and listening to much metal again. She tried going to the US but, thankfully, didn't get the visa. I'm sure she'd end up in a heap of trouble. Carlo is the person who calms her down now, better than I do. Perhaps he can empathise more deeply with her regarding this overwhelming emotion. I turn things inwardly, which I know is not so good for me (blame the young Mom?).

Having these amazing people around is essential for motivation and survival. Just a handful is more powerful than hundreds of dumbasses that life throws at me. Of course, there are many other friends, colleagues and acquaintances, but in these few pages, I only mention the worthiest of all.

## **Birthday #33**

Hot, cold & bloody. That's the name of this year, of which there's still a week left, but the last "normal" week happened last winter. We all thought that last year's winter was the worst... Sitting here, next to a fireplace in a tiny house on the Periphery, with two lovely but exhausted people, writing this diary while the noisiest blizzard is happening just outside the window. It's just black now. During the day, it was just white everywhere. It's an unnerving, snowy, howling heaven. I can even feel the whole house moving and flexing. Does this mean that we are going to have a Year without summer?

The California earthquakes and then a volcanic eruption this May made all this come to be. LA and Yellowstone had it a long time comin'. It is just bad collective karma. Now, "Mom's coming 'round to put it back the way it ought to be." The flights have just recently restarted, with military cargo planes only. Panic riots broke out in the US, mainly on the west coast, when the crops failed in late summer. In fact, I don't know if it could be called a summer at all. It snowed here TWO months earlier than usual and hasn't stopped since. Usually, the last dozen winters were more irregular with the snow cover. Now the frosty white blanket is here to stay.

All this emerging commotion showed massive flaws in the government's readiness. All the trucks' engines got choked by the ashes and dust and were just sitting on the highways waiting to get ransacked by angry mobs. People finally realized that spending billions of dollars on a single stealth jet bomber, for example, wasn't as shrewd as they voted for. Seems like there might be something good coming out of this after all. People are so dumb; they need to be pushed up to their edge, and even beyond, to actually get up and fucking do something about their life, to make an actual change!

20% of our people here voted to send food aid abroad, which I thought was even dumber. Not seeing the end of this winter, the last thing to do is to start giving away our hard-earned supplies. And we worked hard this year since most farm bots couldn't handle the needed adaptations. Since we had a lot of older adults from countries with rich histories, plenty of ancient knowledge got shared and applied manually. At times the city seemed empty, with everyone

going to the farms. Mom and Dad were active online, sharing cooking and food-storage advice while trying to keep people calm and sane. Dad's racing forum ended up turning into a mental health safe zone, and he's been very busy with that. I think I saw him play twice in the whole year. I'm sure that's two times more than most people got to in this year. They both felt they weren't helpful enough and wanted to go to Europe to help. That was just so complicated, pointless and, if I'm to be asked, dangerous, especially for two old farts like them. People need air, water, food and shelter. There are plenty of idle hands on deck! Especially those that think money and stuff are more important than the bare necessities. Maslow must have been turning in his grave all these years...

Carlo used his new dandy muscles and spent most of the year in the European side of Russia, hulking around and rescuing Russian damsels in distress. I don't know; that's how I pictured it. But jokes aside, he really turned around over the past few years. I'm so proud of him! I got petrified when I saw his hands covered in second-degree burns, but they've been healing well since he came back.

Beatrice went east to Mongolia, which suffered severely with the crop yields, and just as they started increasing farming and decreasing livestock. She told me she managed to have an affair with some girl there and a fight with her brother, which didn't surprise me. Just a few days ago, she told me it was a physical fight, not a verbal one! He was the bruised one, which doesn't surprise me; no sane man should mess with my Bea, no sir!

I managed to write more than ever before, and I don't mean only on my networks and blogs, but on forums, talking to people that had it tough, brainstorming ideas and finding solutions out of the dark. This, in turn, made me accept my writing fully, and I don't doubt myself anymore. No more second-guessing - the gut feeling is leading the way! I shared stories of police officers, security guards and even soldiers disobeying orders and siding with the people. I was getting insults and threats for that, but that made me more motivated and confident. If you're not upsetting any single person with your actions, you must be doing something wrong, right? Truth needs to be told, no matter how ugly it is. If someone can't take it, it's their problem. Yes, I've been called inconsiderate many times.

## **Birthday #34**

After reading the previous entry, as I always do before writing a new one, I must admit that this year wasn't so bad. I was about to be entirely harmful and brutal about it, but there were some positives. It's easy to get sucked into negativity when your life situation is complicated and pessimistic people surround you. Therefore, I promise I'll try to be at least a realist.

This turned out to be a year without summer, and the planting season didn't work for any food outside of greenhouses. We've had plenty of "green domes" on the periphery, which always worked flawlessly, proving repeatedly how permaculture and agro-forestry are the way to go. We still had to increase food production wherever possible, so most city-dwellers started growing food in their homes, floors, staircases... etc. Some people did this before the eruption (like with spices, herbs, veggies and fruits), but now it seemed everyone's apartment was like a mini jungle garden.

Aside from the now obligatory fresh food rations (everyone's literally fed up with the preserved foods!), there were a lot of reductions in city transportation and the factory production, in order to supply the power to all the lights, being left on for our future food to nomnom on. Funny enough, I also didn't notice how anyone praised our reactor since, many years ago, people were protesting against it here. I still remember that silly drama. Same with the people who wanted to send food aid abroad last year. If we had done that, we would now be asking for help. Hypocrites everywhere!

It's ridiculous how much food globally was donated from the Southern Hemisphere, especially Africa, being about 20% of the world's population and considered the "poor continent". As the wave of public disobedience continued across the planet, many incredible things have transpired. The United Nations has been completely reformed and have already started passing and upholding laws that will equalise the North with the South and the West with the East. Naturally, there are still countries that oppose this. Still, the majority is voting for significant changes - making basic necessities (air, water, food & shelter) part of human rights, having basic income replace social services, making lobbying illegal, making the media

independent, changing the industrial agriculture model for a regenerative permaculture one and so on... These are most of the things everyone has been discussing for decades, finally being implemented. This alone provided me with so much hope and belief that we will actually make it through this madness we created...

Mom and Dad were very busy helping with the neighbour's gardens. Their experience from the farms helped create proper neighbourly relationships between all of them. A strong bond is inevitably created once you work on something difficult and important with someone. Bea spent most of the time in Novosibirsk with her new girlfriend on her parent's "Datcha", helping build modern greenhouses. I noticed that whenever she falls in love, she forgets about me. I mean, she just calls rarely, which used to hurt me before, but now I'm happy for her, and as long as she's happy - she doesn't need to think of me. Carlo travelled to Iceland to help with the clean-up, and I can't stress enough how delighted I am with this "new self" of his. I hope he takes better care of himself and somehow becomes less clumsy. If that's even possible...

I have spent five months with a team working in Uzbekistan with the "food reformation" movement that now really took off there. I had plenty of injuries and tough weeks, but it felt satisfying and empowering to help out. But then again, one thought kept coming back to me - can such a significant change happen if there are no painful accidents, miserable living conditions, disasters, suffering and even deaths of so many? Why do people need to be pushed to their very edge, and then even further beyond it, to finally change their backward behaviour? Is it a part of our nature, or just an evolutionary fuckup, perhaps? I don't even know if I'm able to understand that, being born in such an easy place - to grow up and prosper properly with decent parents, good teachers and lovely friends... Maybe the reason why I, and so many of our people here, are focused outwards on helping out others abroad is just a miserable attempt to satisfy guiltiness that stems from our privileged positions.

I want to believe that doing good deeds is more important than our intentions and that no one can be responsible for their subconscious behaviour. Still, many allegories exist about how having good intentions of helping out creates accidental suffering.

## Birthday #35

This year we almost had average summer temperatures, both globally and locally. People were starving before the season harvest began; however, that's the Northern Hemisphere. In the "Global South", people had been starving long before the eruptions, and the dark irony of these events is that they weren't affected as much. Thus, life wasn't worse off than before, plus they were still sending some food supplies abroad to the "First world countries". Proper empathy seems to require having the same experiences...

I've been swamped this year, working across central Asia, and in the last three months, I've been doing a lot of online work from my apartment. Just after I finish writing this, I need to go and do a team video call. I'm not complaining; I wasn't hungry for even one day this year, while many people were. I won't even dare complain about getting "only" one month of vacation this year. My engagements mostly involved setting up the countries' inspecting system, the crucial spot where corruption usually slips through. Half of the governments our team talked to seemed to have made virtue-signalling promises and tried to eliminate us as soon as possible, but I have high hopes for the other half. The new people that run governments are primarily young and haven't been in the political systems for long. That means a lack of experience, of course, but also less exposure to bribery and smug self-complacency.

Globally, there has been tremendous progress with the freedom of speech on the internet and the unjust censorship that was getting worse on social networks. A big chunk of power has been taken back into the hands of the people who are the users and the primary source of profit for these companies. For example, hospitals, public transportation, communication and network companies have become non-profit, which they should've been from day one.

The AI-powered polygraph detects lies with 97% success. People's confidence is increasing in AI growth, precision and the farsightedness of its predictions, especially in meteorology, ecology, astronomy and agriculture. Still, in the switch from industrial agriculture to permaculture, people have been working more than bots (which also creates jobs), with the physical and mental benefits

of being outdoors in nature. That was neglected for far too long over the past century of mechanization and the emergence of countless bullshit jobs. One interesting by-product of all of this is that money is leaving sports. By that, I mean how after the weakening of the economy, sales and marketing, sports teams have way less money than before. Games and championships are slowly getting back on their feet, but a football player will never be paid millions of dollars just to move from one city to another. Absurd amounts of money were just wasted on pointless and useless things... While a football supporter that placed bets on some player scoring was at the same time complaining how their own kid should have free education and healthcare.

Mom and Dad were less physical and outdoorsy this year, but they deserve to take it easy now. Together with some other “pensioners”, they made a Q&A channel that became somewhat popular worldwide. It’s about many topics, but all are focused on adapting to a new way of living and coping with all the new changes. It’s so cute to see them on the screen together, looking like the most perfect old couple ever. I mean, they really are. They’re not pretending or anything; it’s just... I’m so proud of them! Parents should set an example even after their kids grow into adults! Changes stop only when the final curtain falls.

Bea came back a few times from Russia and is still there. She seems happy, but she told me she and other foreigner “spies” have been threatened by some local criminals. As the years go by, the criminal soup has been evaporating, and the remains are pretty condensed and spicy. But she feels no fear, and I don’t think she ever did. Aside from that growth many years ago. I miss her, but I don’t want to worry about her. That won’t help either of us.

Carlo ended up in South America, and now I think he’s in Argentina. He’s like a volunteer superhero, flying from place to place wherever he gets the call. He mostly takes trains, but sailing across the Atlantic is an adventure no one wants at the moment. He briefly mentioned an Italian girl, but then he seemed embarrassed after I asked some follow-up questions. So just like with Bae and my parents, as long as he’s happy, healthy and safe(ish), that’s all I need to know, and not to think anything more of it. I say that, yet I still worry a lot about them. Not too much, yet not too little.

## Birthday #36

Just when I started to think life would get more manageable for everyone, I got proven wrong. Ecologically speaking, the northern half of the world did get better as the climate has already started to stabilise, and the volcanoes have finally quit smoking. Economically speaking, life just got tough for almost everyone except us here since we don't do the "economy" per se. At the beginning of the year, a hacking attack occurred on the Wall Street stock exchange.

In August, there was an actual attack by a massive group of protesters, which managed to set fire to the whole building while the ensuing mayhem didn't allow firefighters to get close enough. Hundreds of people died due to panic amidst the mass fear and confusion. I don't approve of these violent acts, but I am for property sabotage, as a last resort. By the end of the year, FIAT currencies are constantly crumbling away as cryptocurrencies are taking over. There are as many of these now as there are world countries. Money, as we all know it, is starting to lose its importance and that, of course, includes banks. They're calling this the biggest economic crisis in history, but it is way bigger than that. Capitalism is having a crisis – it's on its deathbed.

We have had a couple of blackouts for the first time ever. Our gov't called them "resets" as we were cyber-attacked by multiple organisations (or countries?). This time, we're being specifically told not to publish anything related to the worldwide financial chaos since we've been painting for a while now a massive X on the back of our proverbial heads. Some of my publications were blocked from being public, and I had to share them via email. I was so pissed off, but then I realised this has been happening to others for the last 30 years, while this was the first time our government did it. Similarly, I must say that I'm getting sick of today's journalism. I can't even tell from human and AI writing, for example.

On the other hand, the Kazakhstan government praised our work, but the main topic was the ecological restorations that we did in our region. Even over a century ago, local villages and towns never remembered having so much green cover and water. We have repaid our carbon debt for the city's construction twice over already.

Since this year is cyber-themed, I gave our dating app a long overdue second chance, and I must admit I had fun. Not a single guy I met was a douchebag, and this time all of them were actually single. It felt more natural now, mostly because I'm getting more confident. In this way, I managed to strike gold this spring! Although, by now, it seems it was more like silver. Oh well, beggars shouldn't be choosers. Seriously though, he is a really nice guy, and his app profile was 100% genuine. His name is Michal. My priorities were honesty, honour and humour, and boy, he has those in spades! He even made me more honest in my writing - many readers have noticed a change, me becoming too brutal with the truth. However, I now see that he's obsessed with his principles. I mean that he treats them as fixed rules that shan't be broken in any case. I got pointlessly hurt a few times just because he wouldn't budge, as stubborn as Dad is (or used to be). Since he's a software designer, I guess I could call his way of thinking - binary. I don't know whether we'll have a future or not, but so far, it's okay. Until silver turns to bronze...

One starry night we got pretty drunk at one of the rooftop parties, and he blurted out in front of me how he's been involved in the hacking attack, targeting specific mega-companies and exposing their confidential data. I got shocked not just because he never told me he was a hacktivist but that he isn't spotlessly honest as he claims to be. Sometimes, I still feel like the naïve little girl I used to be. Is it because "once an idealist, forever an idealist"?

Beatrice likes him a lot and has heard of his alias, by which she seemed pretty impressed. She broke up with her girlfriend and came back in February. I was delighted to see her often again. Logically, I did get sad about her break-up, but she quickly persuaded me that she was happy it was over and that she was glad she was back home. She got addicted to coffee while there and now has a semi-serious problem. She's drinking it three times a day, and when she doesn't get it, she gets cranky. Mom told me she became friends online with a super cool grandpa who's a retired programmer (another one!) and an outspoken anarchist, and I got to write an interview with him, which helped him out, getting help on his old off-grid house in the middle of the Australian outback. He's so skilled, patient and kind but humble. I wish I could be like him when I "grow up".

## Birthday #37

I honestly don't know how much longer I can be a journalist. It's far from boring, and it feels gratifying and satisfying when you see some effect caused by your article, interview or movie. I think I'm not brave enough. I know I'm one of those passive activists, not a proper, active one. Getting my face smashed in China was not for an article but for personal reasons; Jack was my friend. Oh... I did just write *was* instead of *is*... Have I finally given up on him?

Michal spilt the whole beans and the rest of the legumes about his work over the years. He was building a hacking team of thirty people working from home in their free time conducting operations (as he likes to call them) through protests, elections, poaching, deforestation... Our government, and any other for that matter, has no clue. He told me thousands of teams worldwide like this have been growing in strength since the 2000s. Michal even worked for our government full-time for a couple of years, helping with cyber security! Is that ridiculous, or what? So compared to his results, mine are puny. He keeps telling me I have an imposter syndrome, but I've been through that before. This is different; I want to do more concrete work. Just without the cement, naturally.

There's been big news this year, perhaps the biggest one – having access to the internet becoming a basic human right. At the same time, censorship is being closely monitored and sometimes censored by independent third parties (but who will censor them?!) and that all means the now old-school big media is kind of out of business. Their business model was based entirely on profit. Since the subsidies and lobby cash ran out, they withered away along with the minor percentage of (mostly old) people watching that futile heap of crusty dried-up manure. Copyright laws have been rewritten, so I can make my Disney memes again without fear of getting my posts removed.

Crypto has been getting even more popular, with the biggest currencies being the most (energetically) efficient ones. Money and banks are still around and will probably stick around for much longer than news agencies, as there's still corruption everywhere. Eradicating this infection is not an easy task, but at least it's been started properly. Fossil-based plastics have been almost entirely

replaced by organics. Well, there is the black market, of course, for any product one might desire. One last piece of good news is that 20% of coral reefs have survived, and the die-offs have stopped happening for two years already.

The next big thing - Mom and Dad split! That's what I thought when Mom told me leisurely one evening how she didn't see him in a month. It took some time to realise that they had just taken some time off physically from each other. Perhaps all the projects they've been working on together over the years were too much "nearness" for them. They spent the summer on two different farms, and when autumn came, they moved back to an apartment, seemingly happier than ever. They got me so scared, then confused and now I'm supposed to be happy they've done this!? I should concern myself less with their lives, health and happiness and work more on mine if I ever want to grow old and be like her anarchist friend.

Just as Bea was starting to speed up with her life, planning to get into trouble and do the active activism I mentioned, she got slowed down. Suddenly so, since she had a cycling accident, which nearly broke her neck. She wore a neck brace for a couple of months which she accepted fully, and even embraced the change by going back to playing video games and binge-watching series... But we both are glad she's alive. I hate it when this happens to the people I love. I got shit scared of losing her. I don't want to be worrying about other people's lives. It's like the universe is testing me.

Carlo - I stopped worrying about when he grew up. That's like a few years ago! He's been getting involved in some serious stuff, having accidents and close calls. One of his colleagues got killed while trying to rescue some dumb hikers in the Carpathian Mountains. Also, a bizarre thing happened to him - he got contacted by a Saudi girl to deliver some much-needed data to Isataion and make it public. Last week, he discovered she was a daughter of a powerful Saudi family (does that make her a princess?) who studied in the USA and got sick of all the horrible things they were trying to hide. She didn't mind living simply, but her family has been successfully avoiding BILLIONS of dollars in taxes for over a decade now. There is evidence building up, that shows they were hiring hitmen to kill protesters, activists, - citizens labelling them as *haram* dissidents.

## **Birthday #38**

It was India's a decade ago, and now it is the West African monsoon that started shifting. India barely managed to adapt to the changes, with a lot of assistance through foreign investment and food aid. They are lagging behind the emissions goals but are still "in development" because of the 20th-century setbacks (which were mainly caused by foreign affairs). It was expected of "developed" countries to help out. Most of Africa has the same situation, but at least a unification is foreseeable. Free trade zone has long been established, but open borders are still a major source of fear in the bones of politicians. China has moved its emissions targets, but in other directions, and is far ahead globally, shaming the crumbling European Union and the US altogether.

The economy has started stabilising, yet the banks that have survived are shifting towards blockchains. However, almost everyone knows who's who, so their feeble attempts are destined to fail sooner than later. Of course, it would be silly to expect massive changes, but multiple small changes in schools, companies, communities, cities and countries add up. The torrent can't be stopped now.

There have been gradual upgrades here in wind power (still using the vertical axis) and solar PV - acoustics and aesthetics have been improved, respectively, as well as in efficiency. Apartments are being refurbished gradually as the buildings are starting to get a lovely patina. With all the greenery, the aesthetics are now complete. But our giant Pagoda Tower is becoming somewhat of an eye-sore to me. Maybe it was unnecessary? I changed many apartments myself; even though they were all the same layout, changing a few decorations here and there can make a big, refreshing difference. The big corner apartments I only visited when I had private lessons there (and parties!), and even those few ones had their own character. Of course, neither can compare with the small houses on the periphery, which are all unique and hand-built by the locals. Even I worked on some of them over the years. I still feel I should move there whenever I visit my "tribesfolk" friends.

I made so many friends this year. I realised I hadn't been doing that since I got into a relationship with Michal. It wasn't all his doing, but

mine as well. After we had a short project in Western Africa, which was supposedly a journalist exchange (in fact, an exchange of cyber-warfare secrets), we had a big fight and a dramatic split up. At least for me it was, as I never tolerated romantic drama and pathetic outbursts. Michal surprised me with all the things he said, but not in the way he was saying them. The cause of it all was a disagreement on the strategy of this hacking movement. I realised soon after that I wanted out. He wasn't going to let me go so easily since I wasn't a very trustworthy person! According to him, people shouldn't change their minds! I knew that his binary way of thinking would drive me crazy, and that was the main ingredient of the drama sauce. I even tried saving our friendship, but he wasn't having any of that. So damn stubborn! He called me a fake Robin Hood, and I called him a blind Machiavellian. None of us apologised for anything.

This all took place in spring, and after April, I started making so many friends! Carlo is the one who introduced me to his board games group, which was so fun, relaxed, friendly, and I never felt like time was being wasted there. One of the girls invited me to her badminton group, so I did that - and I still am minting the bads! Just tomorrow, I'm going for the regular weekly afternoon doubles. Our French coach is so good and professional, but his English is really bad, and everyone's having a hard time understanding him. He doesn't care about his accent, and we don't mind, as this is now our meme and dependable source of laughs. Thus, I was again pleasantly surprised by Carlo, whom I don't ever remember being good at making friends and being sociable in large groups. I keep forgetting the fact that people can change, and they do (only if they want to)!

There were no romances this year except one, with a polyamorous couple, which was wild, but a mistake. They hadn't told me they were serious about this relationship, and I didn't want to be a part of it. At least we're still friends, and no one feels awkward sitting next to each other at parties and meets. But in any case, I think I'll take some time off and be properly single for a while.

My parents told me that a couple would be moving out from one of their community houses next year, so maybe that would be a good chance to safely transition into a different way of living. Strange how after trying so many times, I still have trouble letting go of city life.

## **Birthday #39**

I remained entirely single this year, and it did me lots of good! I'm continuing to make new friends and acquaintances (the meaning of the word friend has drastically changed since one particular Zuckerberg came along), yet some old ones failed the test of time and lost significance. I guess that is entirely normal. One bottle can only fill a certain number of cups. Some of the cups are broken, though, and leaking. If you can catch my drift...

However, for the first time, I felt afraid of losing Beatrice as a friend, an actual friend... the best friend. I don't remember ever having a serious fight with her about anything. Well, except that time when we were six or whatever. After her nearly breaking her neck a couple of years ago, I might have been over-protective and nagging too often, and I admit that. But on her side, it seems that one thing that never fully healed was her ego. She will not admit that! It's obvious, and she refuses to try a different perspective, no matter how many arguments and examples I provide. Having good intentions for someone does not excuse any behaviour, but still, there is so much potential in her, begging to be unleashed! And I know she can see that, yet still, she wants to remain in her old patterns. I must give up on doing this, at least for my sake. As soon as I gave up on my parents, they did it all alone. Bea has been pushing me, too – she once even said I must not give up on journalism. Yet she is the person who will often say how "one shouldn't must anything". While she says everything's fine, she seems to carry a grudge. I feel sad and disappointed.

Anyway, I didn't give up on journaling. I still write my blogs and do vlogs occasionally. I just wanted a break and a fresh change from all the drama that journalism always involves. For most of the year, I worked on restorations (wood, clay, artefacts...) here. I spent two months in the neighbouring Caucasus, working on protecting UNESCO ecological zones, which tourists have been "attacked". We've placed strict count limits with more local guides supervising them. This trip reminded me of my intense trip across the Balkans. Now, at the end of the year, I feel like I could've even worked more. I don't feel as exhausted as before, trying so hard to be a "good journalist".

I spent almost as much time on the farm as in the city. I slept in my parent's tiny house, which was weird, but not because of the accommodation. Being almost forty and living with parents that look like grandparents is just wrong, but for me, it was okay since it was only for weekends. I'll probably apply for a move for next year but to a nearby community. I don't want to be far away from them because I know how much it means to Mom to cook a weekly lunch for all three of us. The older they get, the more they enjoy these simple, habitual and lovely things. In a functional family, they surely are.

The worldwide economic shift is progressing, taking casualties in the process - those being the influential individuals that owned the big banks. Some of them are still putting up a cyber fight to disrupt the crypto market. It's already too big to be stopped. I worry that it also might grow too big - to fail us over time. Isataion's economy isn't noticeably affected by any of this, but it is affected by the availability of resources. It is called a resource-based economy after all, thanks to Jacque Fresco. Sometimes a battery upgrade for my phone is way too "expensive" to take, and at other times, hand-made home decorations are ridiculously "discounted". The same applies to seasonal food and fresh water. Over forty years, we have gotten used to the fact that nothing is set or has a fixed value.

I got to see a detailed rendering of the new city-state, which is finally under construction in Libya, near the Mediterranean coast. It seems like a different design from this one, as there are no tall buildings, no centre tower and no designated parks. Looking from a distance, the whole area looks like a park. Housing blocks are just two floors with a lot of shared spaces. I imagine how different the lifestyle will be, and I wouldn't mind spending at least a year there to check it out. Even though that area is a desert and is in a slight rain shadow, everyone seems confident that it will blossom in a decade or two, just like we regenerated this whole region which was in the "Communist shadow". It gives me so much hope that negotiations are much easier now when working on these sustainable projects. Even I remember how easily and ruthlessly a project would get rejected because there was no mention of the monetary profit, but "only" ecological and social benefits, mainly because money was needed to build it in the first place. That is a lose-lose for any economist.

## **Birthday #40**

I travelled to Ethiopia this year and worked on a massive international transport transition project, and some unexpected things happened. The Ethiopians were receiving most of our hybrid and first-generation electric vehicles from us, and they got trained on how to eventually electrify them. This grew to be a massive source of income for the local communities, even beyond our predictions. Now, so many 50-year-old motorbikes, cars, trucks and buses serve their purpose without pollution and noise. The mechanics, electricians and technicians now have confidence in their skills and products. They have even designed some very clever upgrades that none of us could ever think of. This proves how important it is to empower all people, regardless of income level, towards a path of independence. Selling them some useless crap that your company made, which they can't maintain or repair, just puts them in debt and hinders their growth.

The other thing was... Well, it's a little orphaned boy named Ibo, who I got attached to even more than he got to me. He is a son to wish for, which leads to the unexpected part. I felt like I made a mistake by running away from being a mother, and honestly, I still do. I guess I could still try, but with whom? If it were so simple, so many successful couples would be acing their parenting and creating extraordinary individuals. Even in our experimental society, which focuses on supporting parents and children so much, bad parents still neglect their children while putting their selfish needs first. Plus, by the time my child is 25, I'll be a senior citizen anyway...

Yet, I still think of Ibo every day. He's been deprived of basic needs, with the help of post-colonialist education and the corrupt government, but he has remained pure and undamaged by the injustices of the world. He's a talented, fast learner. I keep imagining how incredibly successful and influential he could've become if he got the treatment in the first ten years of his little life that he rightfully deserved. We still keep in touch, but after every time we talk, I cry.

After returning in July, I wanted to be closer to nature and learn how houses and greenhouses are built. I signed up for natural building workshops where I got to interact with people of all ages, including kids, which I took as a quite serious sign for me. Perhaps I

could move to the Periphery, become a teacher here and then I will not have the desire to adopt someone? I could start with high schoolers first and work my way down to toddlers.

Mom and Dad have developed a lack of patience for each other, particularly Dad. Mom has been acting weirdly more and more as the year progressed, and Dad hasn't been so helpful, probably just the opposite of that. She talks very little with everyone, and when she does, it is brief, fragmentary and perplexing (kinda like my writing). She started balancing rocks with a friend from meditation, which is terrific. However, when she started stacking things up at home, this drove Dad mad. A mad Dad no one should have had. So I told him to give her some space and see what changes. He said he would give her the space if she would give him back his things and not move them around. Ugh... I thought people become more patient when they become older, but instead, they become like a patient. I understand that he gets frustrated; also, I don't particularly appreciate it when someone moves my shit around; Bea used to drive me nuts with that. But I never shouted at or insulted her like he does, Mom. He now just goes out and teaches neighbour's kids how to heal-toe or something in his racing games. Mom told me how selfish he was when I was born, which was not such big news to me. But who knows what else I don't know about my parents' marriage?

There were some global and local changes. The richest of the richest are getting heavily taxed and sued, one family at a time. They won't be bleeding the 99% for much longer. Ill Nino and Nina returned, so even though the weather has been bearable this year, the West-Antarctic ice sheet hasn't slowed down disintegrating. Even the scientific community doesn't agree with the predictions. For us here, at least, the year was plentiful, and I have had the least amount of frozen and dehydrated food in years! Spring almost came on time and didn't revert to winter like it used to do ever since I can remember. Solid-state sodium batteries have been slowly replacing the old ones. Bicycles need to be charged much less often, and my phone lasts a week, plus it's lighter.

So yes, I guess there are lots of ups and downs - a "normal" year. I'm looking forward to seeing how normal my life will be when I move out of the city in less than a month.

## **Birthday #41**

Global emissions decline has finally sped up! That should be great news; however, that doesn't mean that climate change has been stopped or even slowed down at all. There's a significant runaway effect; even the best scientists can't agree on its length. For example, just looking at Europe – there was the same number of fires across the Mediterranean Sea, floods in Germany and Poland and a freakin' locust swarm in Spain! The UK and the Scandinavian countries have all gotten used to winter acting all bipolarly. Yet I still have my horrid sense of humour, at least, heh.

Since the Periphery had a few very productive years, the Council unanimously proposed donating some of our food reserves to a most deserving country last month. The country was selected by the AI, and since the Populus voted 74% yes, it was passed, even though the AI voted no to this proposal. The country selected was the Republic of Congo, which was unfairly neglected by the EU and the US. Congo has been trying to decrease corruption over the last decade, yet they were just getting crumbs compared to their larger Democratic neighbour. It seems that if you want to attract the attention of the West, just slap a democratic sign on your forehead. They'll appear in no time to give you "aid" (after they've overthrown the elected government).

What this also showed is that we still have at least 26% of people here who are afraid and selfish. Some thought we should donate to a European country since the food shortage struck them the hardest. However, Africans didn't contribute much to climate change, realistically. Likewise, they've been undernourished for centuries while most of Europe was roaring away in its decadence, which was, of course, the product of the war plundering, enslavement and colonisation.

It's not a secret that I already miss being a journalist, right? Since I moved to the Periphery (yes, finally!) I started teaching ecology to high schoolers (theory & practical knowledge of food production mostly) as I had planned. I didn't plan to have imposter syndrome again. I thought I was done with that crap long ago, but I was wrong. I tried my best, asked my colleagues many questions, and finished courses – on methodology and psychology. This boosted my

confidence, and I can notice a significant improvement in the quality of my lessons and how I help the individual students. Carlo has been doing a course on something almost every year over the past 20 years, and look at him now; he's a totally changed person, a super-human in children's eyes. I also can't stop admiring him. We meet often, but very shortly, unfortunately, he's very busy with teaching all over.

Bae has been coming for sleepovers often, so we properly caught up on everything. She's been having a rough time, romantically speaking, but she got out of all the "skirmishes" unscathed and stronger than ever. She's been taking good care of herself, not just physically but also mentally. It's hard for me to accept that she's willing to sit silently for half an hour each day and think about nothing. Honestly, if Beatrice can do it – anyone can!

I had a slightly traumatic experience, but luckily it wasn't one of the "picturesque moments" as they heard me before I saw them. Laying on soft moss among the trees, blushing, out of breath and sweaty - looking as guilty as a kid with ice cream on its cheeks, sticky fingers and sugary elbows hiding behind its back. I'm not going to write what Mom and Dad were doing there or trying to do. I'm not even going to try to answer why or how at their age. I'll just move on. They're back to being happy together, and that is all that matters. My own romantic excursions (and experiments) are equally unworthy of mentioning, as usual. My sexual life is as average as my attributes - still life.

Dad still doesn't want to give up on his career as a mechanical and electrical engineer. No one made a rhyme like that before I hear, so I guess you could call me a pioneer in the field. Anyhooo, it's fascinating how he stuck to basically one job his whole life. Mom changed so many jobs she makes me look like a master of one. If I'd do an interview with her and ask her to list all the jobs she worked on, I am confident she couldn't remember half of them. I am proud of Dad still wanting to be helpful and contributing; being in his 70s, I just couldn't imagine myself in that position. Of course, I want to be useful after 65, but learning new things should never stop. In Isataion, there are many more Jacks and Jaquelines, which makes sense to me. But would I feel differently if I was in the minority? I guess it's too late now, probably. The clock says 22:22; it's time to sleep, yoo-hoo!

## Birthday #42

The permanent refugee crisis, floods in Southeast Asia, droughts in central Asia, overthrowing of governments and re-elections everywhere else, plus the Siberian forests burning for two months straight this summer... The permafrost started melting rapidly, releasing methane with winds blowing it all over Asia, particularly in our direction. However, this doesn't mean the whole year was crappy. In fact, for me, at least, I'd call this an excellent year!

Aside from the couple weeks of staying indoors because of the air pollution, I got around to repair, re-arrange, decorate, and chillax in my tiny home. I was getting out and about, learning, teaching and mingling. I started enjoying the walks from one community to another, even though there was always a buggy with a spare seat to hop on. It took almost no time to feel like I belonged here, as the city life had been feeling off for many a year. I restarted my vlogging and writing but with much less politics. I got certified in permaculture; it's official now, yay! This, in turn, made me feel even more confident in my teaching, and I guess I radiated this self-esteem outward because I had two whole relationships this year! Well, not at the same time, of course, I could never do that. But not bad for someone who usually has so many failures, too irrelevant to mention.

The first guy was one of the student's parents, a single dad. Yes, I know that was a bad idea, and as soon as his boy found out, things started getting more complicated and serious... and I bailed. The guy was nice, though - gentle, caring, quiet and an excellent listener. Basically, just what I needed. He was too meek most of the time, but nonetheless, after five months of romance, we're still friends.

The other was a teacher, who was fiine, bi, and wild in every single way! We did archery together, collected spiders, looked after the local bat populations, rode bikes everywhere... and much more. I never had so much fun with one person and never felt drained afterwards. A large flame like that had to burn out quickly. So after four months, we split up, but again, we kept our friendship. Perhaps it's even stronger than before when we were intimate. Funny how that is so easy and simple, yet most people can't seem to do it. I don't see how it can fail if there's open but respectful communication and complete honesty.

I still catch up with Carlo regularly, but like before, very short one-on-one time since we're always in big groups, parties and sports. His newfound fearlessness is very inspiring, and I feel it's brushing off on me. This, in turn, made me drop any residual grudge I had with Beatrice, as I realized (with help from a therapist) I was still waiting/hoping for her to apologize to me.

Nevertheless, it seems that Bea still holding onto something. She sometimes seems very cold and distant with me. Sometimes she holds her words back, says something cynical, and doesn't fully share her feelings. However, I have noticed this with her friends, and one girl (or lady? No, we're all still girls!) even told me how she noticed this - how Beatrice is changing. Perhaps this comes with age, but I honestly don't think so. I know that she hadn't talked to any therapist in years. She's staying away from them like a superstitious old lady from black cats, ladders and mirrors. Even if you feel like there's nothing wrong with you, conversing with a professional isn't gonna hurt! I know that I still have a long way to go myself.

At least Mom and Dad are doing great. They still take some time away from each other since they have many friends in different villages and can visit them often. Hence, this distance rejuvenates their relationship and reminds them that it's allowed to miss each other. Oddly enough, Dad started getting into politics, reading the news, and comparing sources. He still hasn't started complaining about anything and seems optimistic, so I guess he doesn't just swallow the information like most people do. It was always hard for him to trust someone. Even after all these years, I think he trusts us two. While I feel honoured and privileged, I feel it's a bit sad since he has had so many friends and colleagues, which he obviously couldn't ever get close to because of this resistance he has. "Think for yourself, question authority and trust no one, my dear Squishy", he always said to me.

And yes, he did call me Squishy and still does, sometimes. After forty years, I have finally accepted it. When I was a wee lassie, I had soft squishy cheeks, and he helped me feel less embarrassed. Who knows what else there is hidden in me that I've been ashamed of, that is silly or pointless? Every time I start digging, I find something. I am a layered head of cabbage, indeed.

## **Birthday #43**

The highlight of this year must be Angela. She's my new friend! Her daughter was in my summer camp, and the three of us would always stay longer afterwards to talk, and we became fast friends. Angela has a younger son; all three are so incredibly artistic! So creative, crafty, and productive, yet still full of potential for more. She moved here just a couple of years ago and lived in France for three decades, where she had a decent but exhausting and busy lifestyle. She has two failed marriages behind her and fully embraces her singleness. She likes to keep herself busy, and sometimes I think she overdoes it to the extent of lacking sleep. I would never let anything stand in between me and my sleep - screw that!

I was astonished when one day in September, Angela showed up alone, saying how she'd like to get her hands dirty, more than just the obligatory one hour a week. Of course, there's always something to do, so we got busy exploring the Periphery communities with their different ecosystems and people. She said she forgot how healing farm work can be as she used to garden with her mom long ago. Thus, we have spent most of our time hanging out with our fingers and toes covered in soil, and we both love it. I saw her once in one of the city cafés, all dressed up and looking sparkly; I barely recognized her. I like the raw, muddy version more. She didn't believe me.

Angela made me think more about Beatrice and how to understand her better. Our friendship improved since we discussed this creative outlet and following through with learning. Bea said her parents were too loose with her, letting her sign up and sign out from whatever grabbed her interest. So even though both of them are very similar, having the same talents, they came out different due to this one small thing. Kids should try anything they want, but they need to learn to keep going despite challenges appearing. Bae actually talked about this with her parents one night, and she said they all understood this and sealed the forgiveness with some teary hugs. Parents are to be blamed for all our actions until we're 18 and for most of our "character design" However, they should be eventually forgiven for this, so we can move on and grow in a new direction without anger and resentment holding us back.

I have forgiven mine a while ago, but I'm unsure whether they've forgiven themselves. Mom once told me she regretted not giving me a brother or sister. I believe she said not to give herself another daughter or son. That, to me, makes a big difference. Dad regrets not being there for me when I was very young and leaving Mom to handle most of my upbringing during those crucial years. I forgave them, but that didn't make a big difference to them, even though I told them many times. It helped me, of course, but I'd like to see them drop all regrets and grudges.

Dad proceeded to drop a bomb one morning when he showed us the permit; he got to visit Tunisia to do some simple volunteering, regarding vehicle management, of course. With him being 73, we were worried for him, but he looks pretty healthy. But bored. Mom didn't go anywhere and spent a lot of time outdoors by herself. She did seem very happy and content, so I won't worry about her either.

Angela restarted my long-lost interest in the Kvorum, so I got more involved in our governance and decisions while keeping an eye on the elected officials. Oddly enough, less than a single per cent of our population is active daily, yet, everything still works fine. After spending time with her lovely kids, she momentarily tickled my yearning for children. However, when she told me how difficult the first few years of child-rearing were. Let's just say I have no regrets about my lack of parenthood. And I still think about Ibo.

Speaking of kids, our birth rate started dropping. At the same time, we got more environmental refugees coming in, so we're still full. In fact, this year, we're at total capacity. For many years we always had about 500 apartments that were left empty, but now there are just 50. Still, most of the refugees are outside the fence and getting supplies (by drones, not in person), but this winter is forecasted to be very harsh, so I have no idea what will happen to them out there.

Greenland's ice sheet slowed down with its disintegration finally, but it must be noted that most developed countries are not trying hard enough to reach the 2050 targets and requirements, while we did ten whole years ago. Nonetheless, many journalists that visit us later tell the world how backward life here is in their eyes. Likewise, whenever I would travel abroad, many things would seem backward to my eyes. I would never want to live anywhere else but here.

## Birthday #44

One democracy lesson is coming in hot! Every year, we get to shortlist a thousand people to get one of twelve governing council seats for each field. Once the votes are cast (all online and privately, of course), we again vote for the final hundred. Finally, the AI chooses the twelve winners. Not entirely random, as it takes into account the representative sample. That means there should be the same spread of people in the government as in the population. For example, there should be about half of the women in, and the twelve elected should correspond to all age groups, just like there are currently in Isataion. Anyone from 20 to 90 can apply, so I did this autumn thanks to being dared to by Angela. When I discovered I was shortlisted for the final hundred, I peed myself a bit. But I almost crapped my damn pants when I got the message that I got in! I won somehow!! I got the Journalist Historian seat, and I have no freaking clue what I am going to do there! I'm terrified!

Just when I started to believe in my confidence, the Imposter came back, breathing down my feeble neck, telling me how I didn't deserve to get the spot, how thousands of other historians and journalists were better than me, more likeable, better educated and prettier to boot. The news came in last week, so I'm feeling it now heavily. I need to start on the 2nd of January, and I'll get some crash course introduction until then, which is less than ten days.

I'll be primarily responsible for communications in international relations and for handling the council debates, which sometimes can get heated and really spicy! I took all the time off from my activities to read up on world history. After five days of reading it non-stop and I already have headaches. Mom says that's from stressing out and not reading since she used to cram-study like this when going to school. I honestly don't believe how anyone managed to learn anything like that. I already forgot most of the Latin American history that I started with... I'm similarly confused about my popularity since I haven't been so active in writing for years now, and when I was before, I didn't have that many followers. I guess I should thank Angela for helping me with my presentation/introduction speech, as I think that was the main reason so many people voted for me.

Not everything was about me this year; I am aware that other people exist on this planet. It is now impossible to forget that our city is packed to the brim. But I heard that a new wave of climate refugees is heading towards the second city-state in Libya, which is almost complete. I shouldn't call it a city-state because it's twelve closely connected towns. They're decentralised (governmentally and visually), and it's a very wide settlement compared to our circular design. I want to go there still, even though the surrounding area looks incredibly arid.

Since it's in the neighbourhood, it would be fitting to mention my Dad's time in Tunisia, from which he came rejuvenated, looking happy and energetic. That's compared with my generation, let alone his. He said no one believed him that he is 74 over there, I hope all those compliments didn't inflate his ego again, but so far, it seems they didn't. Mom enjoyed time alone and, after some time, started telling me how she was missing him, which I think was surprisingly sweet. She was a very productive grandma, making toys with the kids and caring for them. The kids, not the toys. Mom told me she's glad she never pushed me to become a mom, as she now is sure it was more selfish of her, and it wasn't only for my well-being and happiness. I fully understand where she got this from because when I started teaching, I felt like all the kids were the same and the desire to have one of my own dissipated (mostly).

Angela is entertaining to be around, so much so that I have neglected Bea and Carlo. But they don't mind, since they have plenty of friends here. Angela seems like she doesn't have any friends here. She knows a lot of people, she talks to many, but she didn't get properly close to anyone. I thought that was all her, but I'm unsure. In any case, she's one hell of a friend and a mom. She's a motivational epicentre but, at times, can be erratic and irresponsible. I don't mind that, occasionally. Beatrice seemed like she didn't like her after the first meeting, but she quickly befriended her. She even managed to get her drunk, even though Angela was on a dry month! Bea can be such a bad influence. It's like the devil acts through her sometimes. But I ain't no saint, so I better don't complain(t). I better go back to reading some political history now and stop messing around; 2045 is gonna be crazy for me...

## Birthday #45

I remember now why I wanted to get out of journalism. Working 40 hours a week is tough, and having just a month off during the year was draining! I don't know how my parents used to call this normal when they were busting their asses during the "genesis" of Isataion. I'll need to go to work for just a few more days now, and then I'll take my four months off in a row in advance. I don't mind applying again, but sometime in the future, and for a different seat.

At times it felt like one of those old reality shows where people started making alliances and sabotaging each other. Everyone watching us saw through it better than some of us did! The old lady who got the economy seat almost got voted out in June, but we unanimously kept her in, and she improved afterwards. Some people are so brilliant, and they inspired and motivated me so much. The young psychiatrist, for example, was a perfect example of a good host, even though he didn't have much experience in public speaking. He helped me out when I needed to do my part in the debates, to keep it on topic and civilised. I'll remember his brilliant rule for listening at least twice more than speaking, since "obviously, God gave us two ears and one mouth"!

Angela told me she noticed me changing, becoming more confident in voicing my opinion and being more composed. I have no idea how she saw that, but that's what friends are for. I haven't seen her kids at all this year, and yesterday they came over, and my goodness, how they've grown! I noticed that before with some of the students I used to teach, but it always shocks me how quickly kids sprout. In any case, I feel confident now and don't regret my time in politics. I didn't mess anything up badly during my time there, and I genuinely believe I have helped out, and for me, that's always the main point of it all. It still feels hard to believe that I got in!

Beatrice managed to get into trouble with the law while she was abroad. There's a clip of her that briefly became viral, where she was standing up for a hurt protester and shouting at the policemen, "Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me!" That is so Bea... I told her that one day, the music she listens to would get her into trouble, and it did. She spent two months in jail in Qatar, but she said that it wasn't too bad

nowadays, at least not for (foreign) girls. Some local boys there got mistreated, and she published a short story about the events. I helped her out with the editorial and with spreading it around. I hope it shines more light on the dark, underground and unrelenting powers that oppress and abuse in the Gulf countries.

Mom travelled to Malaysia and Indonesia to work with some NGOs and indigenous unions there, and she was very close to getting into trouble herself. Borneo and Java are still full of serious criminals, evading the law while trying to profit off the rainforests and the locals, who are trying to protect them. Policing seems never to succeed anywhere, as long as there's money to go around and accept. Mom managed to come back unscathed, but she's not going anywhere anytime soon, and Dad and I will make sure she takes it easy for a while here and let go of the experiences that gave her memories that still don't let her sleep well.

I spent more time alone with Carlo, and we discussed so many things. It turns out there was a lot I didn't know about him and he about me. I'm so glad he's doing great in life, and meeting his lovely new girlfriend got me thinking about my own - boyfriend, that is. I wish I could find someone like him, but not just like him; I know that wouldn't work. Maybe I start searching actively next year and see what comes my way. I'm tired of all the short relationships I've been having.

That was enough about me; the world has also been going through changes. First, praise must be given to China, India and most African countries for being closer to net zero than the EU and the USA. I wasn't surprised by this, but most people are. Unfortunately, Europe's average is ruined by Southeast European countries, where people still burn stuff, biomass and gas mostly. Aside from winter storms, the US has been hit the most by the recent wave of climate refugees, and this time, they changed their migration policies and started letting people in since there's plenty of space for everyone over there.

We had a small earthquake in our city, which fractured a few buildings (and some comfort zones), but it's nothing that can't be fixed. Our buildings were built with all that in mind. After many years of reforms and changes, the Darya rivers have increased their flow, filling the Aral Sea for the first time in a hundred years! Thus, one can only prosper as much as one's neighbour does.

## **Birthday #46**

This year of changes began with my periods getting intense, as in bloody intense – menopause is coming soon! I mostly know what to expect, thanks to Mom, but still, I don't mind going through the trials and tribulations of it if that means I'll be done with menstruation for good. But I will miss the monthly five days off.

In February, I decided on a whim to change jobs again – I did city maintenance! Okay, it's not my first time doing that, of course, but I did it for the full eight months this time. It felt better than being on vacation, especially after the hectic previous year. The teams were filled with people from all walks of life, ages and beliefs. It was much more colourful, although probably less representative than the council was. I worked about thirty hours a week (more than the city average) and spent most of my free time with a very special person that definitely deserves to be mentioned here.

He is a kind, gentle soul that has respect for everyone and everything he encounters. He's a professional forager. He is hard-working, precise and possesses an impeccable sense of ethics and morality. He doesn't speak much, but when he does, others stop and have their minds blown away or totally baffled because of his particular sense of humour and strong Russo-English accent. I still haven't found a photo of him without a beard, but I won't give up. I'll go so far as to share his name here – it's Misha, and we're clearly madly in love with each other! He's not perfect, though, as he is the least romantic man I have ever met. Let's see whether I'll be able to deal with that.

Bae likes him a lot after she managed to accept the fact that he's ten years younger than us, for which she was criticising me and judging him. She's still reactive and shallow sometimes, but I love her nonetheless. She said he better not shave his beard; otherwise, I'll easily look older than him. I didn't manage to get him and Carlo together, but I panicked when I had a perfect nonchalant opportunity to do so. Since they're so similar, I thought they might dislike each other and clash somehow. I really want them to become friends. Angela liked him from day one, and her kids adore him, and Angie says they told her they both feel like they knew him from before, which

never happens to them. Especially her daughter, who always took a while to befriend anyone, even her generation. Misha, it seems, is beyond generations!

Dad has been doing fine this year, feeling proud of me for working in city maintenance. I'm not sure why that was such a big deal for him, but perhaps their generation still has some stigma towards "street sweepers" I don't know anyone born here with these obsolete ideas.

Oh yes, big news - he agreed with Mom on something huge she did - she adopted a kid! She's technically fostering him until he's eighteen, but Mom's a mom again. Does that mean I have a brother... who's thirty-five years younger than me? It seemed more fitting for me to adopt him, but I don't have the licence. (Yet?!) He just called me Auntie the other day, which was hilarious and cute at the same time. His English is rough, but damn, he's a quick learner in everything he does. She met him last year while she was in Bali briefly. He had just lost his parents in retaliation from the Borneo logging mafia. Activism shouldn't be for those who have children... When she heard he was still homeless a year later and not cared for by anyone, she decided and got it all done in about half a month. I'm surprised to see her so enthusiastic after her trip. It seems she really needed this to complete her.

BB, as we call him, had quite a trip to get here, but he handled it all like an adventure and even kept a diary of his trip. He was pleased to get the hell out of there. Bhumi, which is his actual name, is a hard-working kid. I don't think I ever saw a more seriously diligent eleven-year-old. Even Misha told him to take things easier now and not rush, but he's struggling to relax here. I'm sure he'll soon realise that he's safe and here to stay.

In August, just a couple of weeks after he flew out, a giant tsunami hit that part of Asia and many islands of Oceania. At least 40.000 people from here are still out there, volunteering for the recovery effort. Naturally, they only contribute to a million-strong force of selfless people from all around the world. A few thousand people moved to the Libyan city, which is now being populated slowly. The ocean acidification stopped increasing, which got the scientists baffled. They theorise that it could have something to do with the tsunami, which would be incredibly ironic in a dark way.

## **Birthday #47**

Isn't it funny how most of our palaeolithic ancestors wouldn't live to see their 50th birthday? This means their women didn't have to go through this fucking hot-flushing rollercoaster of a menopause! The stigmatic symbolism is that this is supposed to be the end of my fertility, productivity and sexual activity, however... Misha came into my life and changed everything. I feel like I have blossomed with him into another youthful age. Him being so non-judgemental and caring really helps, like, a whole lot. What a timing! Dare I say we were meant to meet at this fateful time?

This spring, we even moved in together! I couldn't imagine living with a man, sharing everything with him, especially in such a tiny home. But in reality, we don't spend much time indoors anyway, except when the winter comes. But then it's the perfect time to be snug as a bug with someone that manages to warm up your frozen toes. I managed to gain a few kilograms, but I don't care as long as my Beardy likes that it's "accumulation in all the right places"... Oh, how I love that weirdo! Maybe this phat is a by-product of being in love, the hormonal changes, or perhaps the fact that I've worked in a less physical job this year compared to the last one. This year I returned to restorations and repairs and teaching permaculture to our students and visitors, which are increasing yearly. I went back to writing my random daily diary, and it felt nice to write in just a couple of sentences about something exciting and unique that I have witnessed or experienced.

The world almost had another viral pandemic, but luckily (very loosely used term here), it stayed in Nigeria. Thousands of people died in the first couple of weeks before it was contained. The whole emergency lasted just a month because, very quickly, the antidote appeared on the black market first. One team of activists discovered the hundreds of boxes of vile vials in a new hospital from which the virus "escaped". It's still not confirmed whether it was deliberately produced, or not, since a lot of the evidence is missing, including the people involved. I think this is the last desperate attempt from the now weak pharma companies to ensure their survival, and this was the final nail in their villainous coffin.

While the Periphery keeps growing each year, there are more and more empty apartments in the city. There are still many volunteers abroad, of course (especially across Oceania), and many are moving out to Libya. I don't mind that because the city has been overcrowded for 20 years. Here on the farms, we have new, improved robots that can basically do any job. They're quicker and more dexterous than the best farmer out there. But at least half of the tasks are still done by humans. Even some that are seemingly tedious and repetitive. We don't like being inside four walls anyway, plus the mandatory "community hour" has always been at least tripled by everyone, just because the farm work felt not as work at all.

Mom is helping Bhumi acclimatise, so seeing him making friends at school so quickly delights her the most. He sometimes still displays symptoms of culture shock, and I'm still worried about him... worrying. He keeps overworking himself, trying too hard to do things quickly. My motherly instincts had already kicked in, but I feared starting these sensitive topics with him. And just as he sensed that he came to me, asking me some excellent questions that only kids and teens can ask. He once said that he often feels like he's in a dream, living another person's life, playing someone else's player in a game. He says he feels guilty for being here with all of us. He can't relax as long as his friends back home (yes, he still calls Bali home) are not doing okay, which they aren't, as Indonesia is going through a rough time.

Dad had lots of time for BB; they've been spending it well this year. Does this make him now a grandpa? It seems now that everyone agrees that I'm basically BB's mom, not Aunt. Somehow now I don't mind that. But I do mind Bea not having enough time for me because she fell madly in love with someone. I never even met the girl! I've never been like that, no matter how crazy the romance starts.

Angela had found time for me when she told me she was pregnant. The day after, she got an abortion since it was a big mistake. Another mistake was her boyfriend, which is almost sixty. I don't mind the age, but he didn't seem to understand her. In any case, she has one more abortion "pass" left before she'll have to get sterilised. I think she'll do it anyway, and Misha and I are considering it too. Especially for men, as vasectomy is so simple. We're also thinking of moving to Libya for a year, but not yet. Soon.

## **Birthday #48**

This was a simple year; I could even call it an easy one. I mean, I could if the hot flushes weren't there every single day. I now also have the wet flushes, aka the toilet flushes, since no matter where I go, I constantly worry how far I am from the nearest toilet and whether it will be enough time to get to it without running and looking conspicuous. Thankfully, there are trees and shrubs everywhere, for which now I have grown a new layer of respect.

That's enough of my complaining since everything else is fantastic! Maybe I'm happy with all the little things because... I'm just happier as a person. Misha has completed the last piece of my puzzle, and now everything works how it should; it all feels effortless. Even though he's undemanding, I often check whether he needs something to be happier. He always says, with that big smile of his (hidden behind those woolly curtains), "Why would I want to be any happier?". I wish I were more like him, seriously! There always seems like something is missing for me. Like there should be something more somewhere. Over the last few years, I have found out that I got that from my parents. They're much happier now. They respect each other and treat one another lovingly. However, for most of the day, they still aren't genuinely relaxed. Oh yes, my big news is that... I passed the parenting test! With flying colours, of course!

Bhumi is another person I can learn so much from, especially in the simplicity department. He just never adds any supplementary thoughts when he's working on something, just those that are necessary. Our society still has remnants of a condescending attitude towards "simple people". He's 13 now, and he's mastered simple living fully! Look at me now, almost half a fucking century of living and still worried about how someone might crack a joke at me for running off to water a nearby bush with my urine.

I've talked a lot with Bae on this topic for many a year now, and we still aren't able to give less fucks. Well, truth be told; she is to some extent. But when she does get upset or hurt... let's just say she's a more combustible liquid than I am. When my feelings get hurt, I tend to corrode myself from the inside with my deprecating thoughts. Bea just shoots outwards. If she got hit with one of those soft-tipped toy

arrows, she'd retaliate with a full-on missile salvo launch. Anyway, she's doing alright, and her passionate romance didn't work out with the secret girl, whom she says there's no way for me to know. I can understand that she's embarrassed about a mistake or a failure, but why didn't she tell me about her last year, when everything was blooming with them? I tell Beatrice e-very-thing, and she always used to share everything with me, so now (again), I'm afraid our special relationship might slowly crumble away.

Carlo and I had regular meetings, discussing everything until he left for Sri Lanka in July. He went as a nurse, and he's been doing well. He fell in love with another secret girl, who comes from a very traditional Muslim family. But he says the whole thing is pointless – there won't be any future together. A deep conversation started with BB about his parents. His dad was Sufi, and his mom was Shia – they were not allowed to marry, so the two of them had to keep hiding it, not just from their families but from the whole town. This put so much strain on their relationship, and of course, a six-year-old boy notices something's wrong, which must have had a negative effect on him. He still remembers them practising Sama and Dhakr quietly, mindful of their nosy neighbours.

This young man is now concerned with the Nigerian virus resurfacing in Indonesia last month, and he wants to go to help out somehow. I understand him completely, but he's too young. Dad said that if BB goes, he'll have to come along with him! He recently had a health check and scored the highest in his generation this year, so I wouldn't worry about him. I just hope they get those vaccines there as soon as possible so the epidemic gets stopped in its tracks.

Social networks aren't helping resolve situations like this. Just like qazi-homoeopathy and cheap essential oil gurus are all over the feeds, trying to sell their overpriced placebos while people are dying. We don't even need the old TV media when we have this...

Regarding the climate changes, the biggest ones are still the bureaucratic ones, and there is still more left to do to get everyone to cooperate. We, here, have met our targets long ago. People don't believe that here, for example, we have only 900 buses and 300 cars. Last year, 30% of trips were done by bikes, 15 by buses and five by cars. That leaves half, which is done by our own two legs.

## **Birthday #49**

While the “advanced” world is moving out of the cities back to the rural areas, the developing world is still doing the opposite. The “global north”, thanks to strict climate laws enforcement, just barely managed to hit their emissions targets, while, for example, India is behind and China is ahead of their goals. By the way, the Amazon still didn't start the “dieback”, and the global CO2 concentration is almost 300. Very soon, there might be a new wave of Chinese immigrants because a couple of months ago, The Great Firewall of China has fallen! It was getting cracked over the last years, but this time their own hackers managed to open up the internet doors for all the Chinese people, not just those rich (or nifty) enough to have a VPN. This, in turn, created a massive cascade reaction, with all the questions people are asking their government while not getting any satisfactory response. Just a few days ago, enormous protests broke out in the twelve big cities. Considering that a “big city” in Chinese terms means at least 10 million people – that is about 300 million people on the streets, shutting everything down. I know for a fact that so many Chinese-speaking people from here are still constantly on standby to help out as much as they can online.

My beloved Beardy has decided to undo his vasectomy since now there is no way that I can get pragnet, finally. The menopause is on its way out, thankfully. While I'm on the topic of kids, BB indeed isn't one anymore! He's 14 this year, so next year, he'll be starting high school! With every passing month, he seems taller, and his voice seems deeper. He's doing great, but still, I'm worried about him not learning how to make things more manageable. He still wants to go “home”, although he is less agitated about everything now. However, Beatrice and Angie are highly agitated because they had a big fight about children and motherhood. I wasn't there when it happened (the fight... and the motherhood), so I don't know whose side to believe. I know that Bae can be super direct and brutal, but I also know that Angela still has a lot of ego, and it's easy to trigger something in her. Thus, I'm not disappointed in Bea, although she should've kept her mouth shut. It's obvious how disappointed Angela is with me for not taking

her side so we can talk shit about my Bae together. The funny thing is they don't see how similar they are. What a soap opera!

Mom and Dad are doing fine; I hear they often fly kites with their friends in the early mornings. I feel I should spend more time with them, not just going once every two weeks for lunch. Mom gets ropey when I don't stay longer, but even Dad can see that it's not because she really needs me there. It's just... a mom thing. And according to her and Angela, I just can't understand those feels.

I was busier this year with restorations, plus working a lot more on the farms with Beardy. I definitely don't miss journalism and activist photography anymore. The only photography I do now is of upcycled furniture – noice! I still write publicly, of course, but I put much less effort into it. The followers see that so many have left. Whatever, I don't expect anyone to keep doing the same thing over and over, so I don't want anyone to expect the same from me.

Still, more people are moving to Libya, but that was expected and predicted by our governments. In fact, they wanted this to happen since we were getting too crowded here for too long. I've been feeling this the whole time! Now there's more room for the Chinese, so perfect timing. Unless they overcrowd us soon? At the moment, it seems that most Chinese emigrants just want to move to "The Beautiful Country" of America.

The last thing I wanted to write down here I almost didn't... I often stop myself writing a passage on something and give up because I think it's irrelevant. But sometimes, it's because it just hurts so much to write. Something shook me to the bone, and I still think about him. It's about my dear Jack. They released him after 24 years of imprisonment. I had to watch the release video a few times until I recognized him. In it, I could only notice that he has two prominent scars on his shaved head. He's missing one eye and one kidney, apparently... That's not what made Jack – Jack anyway. The scariest thing is that he now seems just a mere bleak apparition of the Jack I remember. There's no emotion or energy left in him at all. I was fighting against imagining what they were doing to him there so much that I had many nightmares about it... I have recently tried reaching him through a mutual contact but to no avail. Maybe I shouldn't even try? Maybe I should act like he's still... gone.

## Birthday #50

I didn't stop trying. At least not so quickly. For almost half a year, I was trying to get to talk to Jack online, of course, but he was being hidden by his old friends and the new revolutionaries over there. Then one day, when I was going to the Pine Pagoda to replace my broken ID, I met a girl who was speaking on the phone to someone who tried travelling to China. She told me it's almost impossible to enter China now, and not a good idea because of all the violence occurring there throughout the last year. Aside from them being the majority of our recent immigrants, everyone can quickly notice how they flood the internet. Yes, it seems the internet can be flooded. There are endless amounts of leaked documents exposing the corruption and lies of the party members. But in any case, I'm glad the people there finally can be free to say whatever they want. Whether democracy will work over there... only time will tell.

So, happy half of the century – to me, yay! Everyone told me today how I was supposed to be happy, at least for this birthday, but still, I don't care about birthdays. I'm even slightly disappointed in myself because when I was younger, I remember imagining myself being 50 - so wise and chill. I didn't reach those expectations yet. Perhaps they were too high, or maybe set too low. There was more celebration for me last year in June, during the utterly crazy 24-hour party for the birthday of Isataion. Even though many didn't believe it would make it so far, this place looks more robust than ever! Through it all, people have been coming and going, but now, Isataion's population is a stable, healthy and happy bunch of international misfits.

I worked the minimum I needed this year, but no teaching this time. The restorations were so healing, and adults there don't take away energy from me, usually. I got to spend more time with Mom and Dad like I wanted, which made me realise how little older people need to feel cared for. It's not as complicated as people think. Bea said I only say that because it's my parents, but I wouldn't say it's easy if they were someone else's. So next year, I'll prove this (to both of us) by taking a full-time job as an elderly caretaker. I'm almost done with the theoretical course already. The demand for this is incredibly high; it's

one of the most valued jobs here at the moment. And the value here in Isataion is still represented in our LUX credits.

Bhumi's life has been intense; after doing a school vlogging project, he got so empowered he started his own. He asked me many strategically essential questions, and I helped him set it all up. He's very motivated, passionate and consistent. This newfound confidence attracted a mysterious young female from his grade, and they fell in love as quickly as two teenage flowers do. Perfect time for this if you ask me (hopelessly late if you'd ask Bae). BB only shares the information that he deems necessary with me. I got upset the first time he "censored" me, but I quickly remembered how I was at his age. Perhaps I still am a bit shy when it comes to motherly things. I realised how judgmental and critical I have become now that I'm "sorta mum", as his GF called me once. But in all seriousness, I don't want to ruin his trust, his honesty with this over-protective BS of mine. I feel it's already under a strain because just yesterday, when I asked him where are they going out tonight, he replied, "Somewhere. You don't need to know everything, Miss Nosey."

Another relationship that is strained, but loads more, is with Angela. I think it's breaking apart. I'm still unsure if I should message her and ask her to do something together because I had clear signs that she thinks I'm a fool. What happened was that last winter, she got into social networks again. Then into politics. She was already into gossiping, and that was, on its own, one of the most annoying things about her. Plus, she started sinking deeper into the abyss of conspiracy theories. I wouldn't mind any of that if she kept it to herself. But she bombarded me with it all, pushing her opinions on me and often condescendingly. I never knew she could become like this! She's the first person that gets triggered when someone tries to force something on her that she disagrees with. I have opinions too, but I don't take them seriously. I'm open to new ideas, but in this way - it just creates unnecessary friction.

So, when it comes to thoughts, feelings and emotions... I try to accept them and just let them pass through. And they do pass, on their own, just like clouds come and go. Some heavy dark ones stick around for longer as they unleash a rainstorm of tears, but on easy days most clouds are light, fluffy and even nostalgic.

## **Birthday #51**

This September, I heard a rumour that Jack had died in his home in Hong Kong, but it's impossible to confirm. Now, sitting here at my fold-out desk that Misha repaired yesterday, I want to fold and close this chapter. I tried last year, and now this... I'll take it as a sign that he's gone for good. I've been sad and angry for too long, and now I want to be at peace. Especially if he has found his peace. I made a video with photos and wrote a speech about his influence on me, so I bid him my final farewell, and that's over.

I was so proud of myself for getting into elderly care this year, and I think I'll do at least another stint. I have my ten oldies, plus Mom and Dad. Funny how now I get to see them more often. I think that anyone who has had parents that they love can do this job. Sure, sometimes they're annoying, and sure, sometimes it gets dirty and smelly, but you can learn so much from them and hear amazing stories from their lives. The joy you give someone by helping them live easier and feeling less lonely quickly outweighs any cons. The only thing I don't like is that I'm always available for them, so I have to have my phone with me all the time. Otherwise, 25 hours a week is totally fine. That's the current local average, by the way.

Misha's been returning to Russia often, working on some food forest projects, so I missed him a lot. We don't live together since February, and that was a sudden decision we made. But we were so relieved! We had mentioned it last year, and it seemed that we were overly cautious and didn't want to frighten each other. It's so funny how little good communication is needed to fix any issue a couple might have. If this hadn't come up, maybe it would've grown out of proportion, and we might've had our first big fight over co-living. Like this, we're both happier. And he's still in the same community, like, two minutes walking from my house.

Beatrice has been quite... docile ever since her mystery relationship. She hasn't gotten into any trouble that I know of, wasn't fighting with anyone except Angela, and according to her, she wasn't aggressive to her like she could have been. She didn't travel anywhere, but she isn't lazy either. She's going to her regular dancing parties still. So it's not depression. From what I know about mental

health, she doesn't seem to show any symptoms. The only thing that bugs me is that she still doesn't want to talk about that girl. So I think she might have had some traumatic experience that she just ignored. If that's the case, things will probably just get worse.

I haven't been thinking too much about Angela, but it's a crying shame what happened to her and a damn waste of our friendship. I still miss her; think of everything we did together, even though she doesn't care much about me. Yet somehow, I'm still worried for her, even though she isn't worth it. Angela's opinions are more important to her than her friends are; it's as simple as that.

BB is still secretive about his girlfriend, but I'm not nosing around anymore. He still asks me things occasionally, so I'm glad I gave him the space. He probably thinks I'm not cool enough to know everything. Last month he asked me about Beardy being away and how I'm dealing with missing him, and how distance could influence a relationship. Naturally, I gathered that he's been having a rough time recently. So I had to fight my urge to prod and pry. But overall, he seems alright, whatever is happening in his life. He seems to have taken life a bit easier. He is learning to do things slowly, without all that self-imposed pressure.

Carlo has been abroad for a couple of years already, in Brazil. After many months we just had a video call last week. It was very short and intense because he just told me an indigenous group rescued him. He was kidnapped by some white men and beaten up for his conservation efforts in the local rainforest. That's basically how much he wanted to share with me. So, no matter the new systemic changes in the government, there are still remnants of the old, greedy and corrupt behaviour down, deeper in the capillaries of the society. I did some research about it, and it seems that a certain Canadian logging company might be involved.

Most of the companies in the EU are owned by unionised workers, yet, there are still people who will try to mess it all up. After the successful introduction of universal basic income in Iceland, a couple of more countries in the EU have implemented it. That's still very gingerly if you ask me. What's the big hold-up? Fear, nothing but fear. The people in the "advanced" countries are distinguished, among other characteristics, by selfish cowardice and individualism.

## Birthday #52

Sometimes, I feel I'm getting old. I make those noises when I bend over to pick something up or sit up or down. I forget why I went back to the bathroom, and a confused woman stares vacantly back at me in the mirror. But I definitely don't feel old when Beardy's around...

Anyhoo! I wanted to take some time off from elderly care and go back to city maintenance, but I just did it part-time and decreased my hours with my oldies. When you tell them someone else will come instead for the next month or heaven-forbid a year... One lady even started crying! I've only had this happen with very young students I taught back in the day. So I couldn't just let them go entirely. LUX are accumulating nicely, I must selfishly admit. But I am starting to wonder, will there ever be a way out? Or will I stop taking care of them when I ultimately become one of them? If you can't beat them, join them, I guess. Resistance is futile!

Just as I started to get bothered about Beatrice, she left! Now I'm distraught; it's been four months and no word from her. One day she told me she was sick of being a passive activist and had to go on some repurposed fishing ship in the South Pacific to do what was right. A couple of other friends of hers joined her there. A part of me is happy for her because she wasn't herself these past few years. All this does sound like my crazy Bae. But her being somewhere on the open ocean on the other side of the world (literally!) is hard enough, even without complete radio silence!

Mom and Dad took a half-a-year vacation across India, Bhutan, Nepal and Kashmir. They were communicating with me regularly. Mom - almost every day, and Dad - like once a week. Thus, they're their usual selves. I felt happy that I don't have to at least worry about them. But after they came back, they were so strange. They were deeply content with themselves, obviously physically tired and very quiet. Obviously, they were full of impressions, but not many were coming out. Until I asked them what they were planning next, they looked at each other, smiled and replied in unison, "We can die now peacefully". I'm sure people hear their parents say this with a grin on their faces, but I felt scared because it sounded serious, man! Should I worry about them after all?!

Bhumi has already announced his plan to take a gap year after he's done with schooling here, and I must accept that because I know how much it will mean to him. He's so intelligent, mature-like and independent, and I know deeply that there's no reason for me to worry about him when he goes away. But try talking that sense into my (non-biological) motherly instincts; oh boy! I did a gap year myself, and it was one of the best decisions of my life. Bea went to Uni, and on many occasions, she said it wasted too much of her life on theoretical knowledge. Still, I will not force anything on my dear BB because I know in my heart of hearts that he will do great things in life!

Carlo is still in the Amazon, crossing into Bolivia with local activists and groups of scientists. He has been in contact more regularly, but that's another person I worry about... Damn it, this year has been and still is exhausting! I don't ever remember worrying so much in my life. I finally can understand Mom now, how she was before. I told her this, and she gave me the longest hug ever. It's incredible how healing that was – I felt light, airy and confident in the future the rest of the day. But I don't want to go to my Mom's every single morning to get a hug. I need to find a way to deal with this over-thinking. I haven't been meditating regularly, just doing my quick 11:11 ones.

We have been so used to bartering and trading that we basically use LUX primarily for travelling. I don't remember when I wanted to import something rare and unique for myself. Natural resources – soil, water, forests, minerals, wildlife – and food are the best currency. If knowledge is king, then food is queen, hah! Food is producible, unlike minerals, which are non-renewable and non-producible. Yep, that's a word now.

Elsewhere, this year was tranquil. There were no major conflicts in the news, just the now-regular, Eat the Rich protests, union strikes and climate refugees slowly streaming across the globe. Taiga has stopped shifting as the PPMs are steadily dropping still. I wish that, somehow, my 15-year-old self knew that things would work out in the end. I would be much less anxious back then. But if I did know, would I ever care about my actions, words, and activism? There are no good times or bad times. These epithets are just creations of our mind. The times are just time passing by, with things going on, no? I feel like this has been my recurring mantra.

## **Birthday #53**

Open, honest communication! That is the key to any long-lasting and meaningful relationship. Misha has known this forever, but I've just now started to walk that talk consistently. Once you practice something and prove it repeatedly in your own experiences, you can actually know something.

I will even dare to say that Beardy and I are soulmates! I have been suspecting this for a while now, but I was afraid to say it (or write it). In all honesty, he is one of those rare people who could have a great relationship with almost anyone, but I have always felt like there was someone special waiting for me somewhere down the line. That's probably why I never fully invested myself in all those short relationships. I don't regret any, as I learnt something from each of them, which prepared me for this. Of all the people I love in my life, Misha is the only one I have never had to worry about... anything. I just wish that I could be at least half as dependable as he is.

There are days when caretaking work is exhausting, and I want to quit it all for good. But then, one lovely older man gave me a beautiful, unique, yet simple scarf that he had been knitting for me secretly for weeks. That makes all the "bad" days vanish into thin air! This was naturally accompanied by a waterfall of tears on my end and, consequently, a small stream on his. I regain motivation by looking at these lonely older people like they are my uncles or aunties. Not everyone had kids of their own, and not everyone's kids stayed around. And that is okay! We are all one big family, right?

Mom and Dad have moved to a different farm community, which is quite far for me to walk to. They said they had some friends there, but my ego kept throwing a thought that it might have something to do with me for some reason. Over a 5-hour video call, where I also shed some waterfalls, Carlo told me he's finally coming back! So many incredibly motivating but sad stories he has to share. He said it seemed like he had lived a whole lifetime over these past few years. Coming back will surely feel like waking up from those rare dreams where you feel like you lived out years of life. He's getting tired of it all, and it seems that more and more locals are joining the indigenous

peoples for strength and protection. He did say he wants to see old age come, thankfully.

Beatrice, on the other hand, hasn't communicated at all with me or anyone! Not a single word from her or any of her friends. To say that I'm worried is quite an understatement. All those feelings about Jack when he got kidnapped are resurfacing. I thought I had processed all that well, but I haven't. It seems like I have ignored some feelings and thoughts, and they've grown more assertive in the meantime. The goddamn feeling of helplessness is the worst! When there's not a thing you can do to help the person you love, it is excruciatingly exhausting. Patiently waiting – yeah, sure! Hoping for the best – my ass! Sending prayers... don't even get me started.

Bhumi has taken his gap year and returned to Bali to spend time with friends and volunteer. I would've expected myself to be very worried about him, but surprisingly I'm not. My motherly instincts are exhausted from worrying about Bea because I know she's a troublemaker! Ugh, this paragraph is supposed to be about BB, not Bae! Anyway, he's been checking in weekly, and that's enough for me. Of course, a part of me thinks that's not enough, but that same part also says how I'm not enough sometimes, so that source of opinions is unrepeatable.

This fall, there was a worldwide internet failure for two whole months, and everyone that used satellite internet got cut off, which is more than half of the world's population. We are still land-based here, so we haven't had any issues aside from many apps not working and cloud data being lost. Allegedly, it was a cyber-attack by a new terrorist organisation called "Anarchists for Freedom". Great, just what we all needed right now. For fuck's sake! I lost all my old short blogs, but luckily, I had all my long stories saved on my PC's storage. Cryptocurrencies weren't affected at all, luckily.

People are still transferring to Libya, there are fewer Chinese immigrants, and our birth rate is slowly declining. I personally don't know any family with more than two (biological) kids. But the ageing population isn't a problem since the work hours are getting shorter with automation increasing across jobs. Still, elderly care is the highest-rewarding job here. Even though I might seem shallow, that does help me stay motivated and not quit.

## **Birthday #54**

I've added another part-time job to my list. So aside from caretaking, I also taught Ecology and worked more on food production with Misha. I feel like that's the only way to spend more time with him now since he's been spending more and more time elsewhere for the last couple of years. I'm not jealous or anything like that. I just miss him. He never leaves for too long, and we always get to find time to sleep and cuddle, but I don't get to see him during the daytime as much. He was involved as a master forager teacher/instructor, so I decided to tag along with him. Funny how I turned out to learn so many new things from him and all the communities we visited with his team. Well, OUR team.

Mom and Dad have been doing great in the new community as they took up some new daily chores there. Mom's in charge of forestry and fire prevention (when did she learn that?!), and Dad's been responsible for electrical systems and composting. They work like two hours a day tops, and they love it! They both got tanner, and Mom seems slimmer as well. The most shocking thing is that they are sleeping in the same bed again! For the whole year, apparently. Not bad for a couple of eighty-plus-year-olds.

Beatrice and Carlo came back! I was worried sick about Bea but - no more heartaches and headaches! I'll forever cherish this one night we stayed after everyone had left around a campfire - Misha, Bea, Carlo and me. We talked and listened and laughed and cried late until the night tired us. It felt like time flew by, but I also stood still. We were all on the same level; even though Bea and Carlo were full of stories to tell, we all shared our presence equally, and the whole universe felt just right. We hadn't had any mushrooms or herbs; we didn't need them. The slow crackling of the fire below and the shimmering of the starry sky above was engulfed by songs of many night birds together with the wind occasionally stirring up leaves like waves tickling the water's surface.

Bae had her share of adventure and activism. They were on this ship called "New Rainbow Warrior", sailing across the Pacific and from the Arctic to the Antarctic, homing in on suspicious fishing activity that was picked up by the satellites. Most of the ships were

small, doing things by the books, but some big ones were shady. Several had fake permits and illegal species aboard, and a couple of them put up a fight. There are still so many people that want to eat fish, dammit! Thus, Bea's worst close call came about one stormy morning, where she was almost swept off the deck into the raging ocean. She said that was the yellow card for her, and the next time they docked in Singapore, she was going home.

Carlo's stories were more brutal, bloody and shocking. It's not just the rainforests endangered by the illegal activities, but also the recently discovered Inca temples in the jungles getting ransacked and vandalised. There just aren't enough drones or satellites to cover all the parts of the Amazon - hiding in the forest is much easier than on the ocean's surface. There are still many fights to be fought on land and water. When Carlo came back, he moved into a city apartment, but just a couple of months later, after our fantastic campfire night, he relocated to a nearby community.

Bhumi was sorely missed, even by those who still haven't met him, especially by us who know and love him. I told him this recently during a video call and saw his eyes tear up. He misses us too, but he needs to stay longer in Bali. He joined an international team exposing all the illegal things happening there. Surprisingly enough, most of the demand is coming from the US, not China. Of course, I worry about him, but I can see how mature and confident he seems. Similarly, not even once this year has he called Bali home, and a few times he called Isataion home; thus, that fills me with hope. And since my menopause is long gone now, I don't have any more excuses to go on my own adventure somewhere, so I can also have some stories to share!

The last year's internet collapse is mentioned only when the increased storage drive prices are noticed. People forget the hard times way too quickly. Desertification around the Aral Sea has stopped, and the toxicity of the soil has been reduced sufficiently since the DDT has been removed. We haven't used almost any new raw materials here, as the circular economy has been working correctly with all the repairs and recycling in place. Most importantly, all the things we designed with a second life in mind decades ago are making the most significant impact today because they can be easily repaired, upgraded and eventually fully recycled.

## **Birthday #55**

I'm pretty happy with my work-life balance now, especially after reading how still so many people abroad live (or should I say struggle?). I go to the city often because of my oldies and usually take a different way back home, passing by places with lots of memories and places I can't recognise. I continue to spend more time on farms, even though I'm often not in the same team as Misha. I still miss him. He's absent a lot, but it's better than last year. Mainly since Bea is here all the time, I see her almost every day around the communities. Carlo rediscovered his love of gardening, and we sometimes tend to our plants together. He seems so happy to be back, and often he tells me fragments of scary stories from South America, which make him stop in his tracks and change his mood for a long time afterwards. I'm so damn lucky to still have these beautiful people in my life, especially since they're so near that I can give them hugs and kisses! Friends come, friends go, but having even a couple of true childhood friends around is worth more than anything.

Of course, I miss my dear Bhumi enormously and sometimes worry about him, but after every video talk, I feel confident in his skills and experiences and that he can handle whatever comes his way. He's still such an inspiring soul that hasn't changed a bit since the day I met him almost ten years ago. The organisation he's a part of is becoming powerful and recognised, and they're active all across south-east Asia. I feel he's in safe hands over there.

Mom and Dad are still doing great, and they're so independent that they never ask for help, not just from me but from anyone in their community. I know this because I checked. It was hard for me to believe how two 85-year-olds were doing so well with each other. Mom's still learning new skills! She started sewing, and she's been pretty creative with her repair work, but she has constantly been unleashing her inner artist. The thing with her is that she's never been super-dedicated and followed through. We talked about this a few months ago, and she said how it was her mom always telling her how "it's not gonna work", and "people are not gonna like it", and "everyone's gonna laugh at you", and so on. I got the same treatment from them, but luckily very rarely. Dad still helps with mechanical and

electrical projects, both large and small, and his opinion is quite respected, but I am glad they don't let him do the actual work anymore and climb onto and into things he'd want.

Speaking of older people, we have made a new friend. I say we since he is so charming with everyone I know; he won our hearts so easily even though he's a two-meter-plus mountain of a man! His name's Leo, but we all call him OG. Carlo made friends with him first after talking about the criminal activities and the underground mafia in Brazil. He seemed very knowledgeable on the topic. When asked about his life in Russia, OG has been categorically adept at avoiding the subject. Since summer, we only discovered that he was not a small fry criminal, possibly a hitman, but he exposed some oligarchs whom he shouldn't have had to. He served some time in a jail near Grozny, then got bailed out, took his backpack, hitchhiked to and managed somehow to cross the Kazakh border and got to our gates about fifty years ago. He's 84 now, covered in old tattoos and scars which all look alike on his tired, crumpled skin. He recently completed his list of "righting his wrongs", which still no one has managed to see into. If you hadn't known all this, you'd think he's the sweetest and most ethical person you'd ever met. He transformed when arriving here since he got all the necessities for life and didn't owe anything to anyone. He says he never even once thought of harming anyone here, but he almost punched a very rude French journalist many years ago that talked shit about us being a bunch of commies. So, Leo is like an older, big brother to all of us.

Oh yes, there's a world outside the gates, so I better fire through the news in rapid succession. All kinds of sports have changed over the past 20 years, and all teams and players are now strictly non-profit. The finances are transparently monitored, but they make a fraction of the money they used to anyway. PPMs have dropped below 350 finally, and the population here has dropped below 400k. Even African and Indian population growth has started stabilising. AMOC seems stable, especially in the critical Labrador Sea. The Siberian permafrost is finally melting slower! Even these tiny improvements count if they're heading in the correct direction. One must remain optimistic about our future, no matter how bleak it may seem. That includes the scientists!

## Birthday #56

Every two years, the fence that surrounds the Periphery is moved outwards. On average, around 500 people of all ages start new communities each year, most coming from the city. The fence is said to be removed entirely next year. I'm glad I jumped into this on time since the older communities are more developed. Similarly, the residents are more mature. People switch and move around, but once they find the right neighbours, most stay in the same community for decades, and some even get buried/planted there. Thus, they move from permaculture food forests to Eternal celestial pastures.

Contrary to popular belief, there is more variety of people here than in the city, e.g., my neighbour OG. He's accommodating and productive here. He loves to get his hands dirty out in the food gardens while his age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, spiritual beliefs and history are all irrelevant.

Carlo has told me he's simultaneously started looking at Leo as an older brother and a father. His feelings get all mixed up at times, and he has started getting worried. OG missed his health appointment, saying that he doesn't need one (which most do believe), but Carlo has been pushy and a bit out of line with him. It's cute to see him getting worried about someone he cares for a lot, but it got me thinking about how I often get those outbursts.

I very nearly became overbearing with Bhumi, and this year has been the hardest so far. The new hologram calls aren't cutting it anymore! I miss him so damn much and worry about him a lot. I've done some emotional digging recently after a meditation session with Misha's friends, and I found out that I'm worried less about his well-being there and more about him deciding never to come back here. How selfish! I felt the same selfishness with my Mom a long time ago and with some ex-boyfriends. Clingy possessiveness can be cleverly disguised in love and altruism. The scariest part is - how often have I done this to others?

Beatrice has been a worry target of mine for a long while. Recently, she complained to me about how she always gets into crazy and volatile relationships that quickly explode whenever a problem arises. I told her she should spend more time alone, but she confuses

loneliness with solitude. They're really not the same thing. I remember Bea being either hopelessly lonely and pathetic or engaged in some incredible romance. The former makes me her best friend, and the latter makes her forget me altogether. I try to be there for her anyway, even when I'm abroad, but I don't think she gets it. She's addicted to the other person, no matter who that is.

So yes, I went abroad this year! Just as I started to think there was no need to travel and see the world, I got offered a seat on the team of sociologists as a journalist/photographer. I quickly ditched my oldies and students to substitutes and jumped on board. It was a long trip, taking fast trains to Spain and then a slow flight to Peru which was our final destination. Since the sticky colonial fingers were cut off from South America thirty years ago, everything has blossomed here! Carlo told me about this, but I always thought he was exaggerating, being deprived of "nice things" in the rainforest.

My team was supposed to help with their educational reforms and employment system. However, we were just bombarded with questions about Isataion and our way of life there. It caught most of us by surprise, as I, like many people, feel like people either got used to us or forgot about our existence long ago. The locals couldn't believe the before & after photos and videos of the broader ecosystem we got here. Many say they're interested, but generally, a tiny fraction of people actually do migrate. Unless they're ordered not to, then that fraction increases dramatically.

I missed Beardy so much while I was there, especially his deep intimacy and calming presence. I found myself surprised at this and slightly worried. I don't want to be possessive and selfish with him. He isn't like that with me. He told me before I left how I could go and do whatever I wanted with whomever I wanted. I admire him for this, and I want to reciprocate. I appreciate him immensely, and I'm grateful for every day we spend together, even more so when we're apart.

But does that mean I'm addicted to the other person? When I imagine living without Misha now... I dread every bit of it! I know that's not good, and I give this advice to others, yet, I don't fully practice it. What will Dad do when Mom goes? Or vice-versa? They complement each other so well now, and they seem perfectly fine together. But shouldn't our purpose be within ourselves?

## **Birthday #57**

Bea's menopause is over, and with it are gone the unprovoked monthly abdominal stabs and bloody scraping of our reproductive flesh and organs. I don't know what we women ever did so wrong to the Gods of evolution to get the short end of the reproductive stick.

Anyway, I went back to teaching; I teach ecology and carpentry restorations with middle-school and high-school kids. I still cared for a couple of oldies who grew very attached to me. I don't mean my parents, as they don't care so much about my visits anymore. Now I have much more energy and patience for them.

But the kids... they aim really low. I noticed it over the years, but this year it seemed like most of the kids were just not brave enough and not motivated enough. They never follow through. At least not compared to my generation (oh dear, I am getting old, aren't I?). This is all rather worrying, and I have talked to many teachers and parents about this, and every single person has confirmed it. An old proverb says: "Hard times create strong people. Strong people create good times. Good times create weak people. Weak people create hard times." Should we then be worried about everything we've accomplished, created and built so far?

Isataion still gets lots of visitors from all over the world each year. I had never bothered to mention them as often, but meeting some journalists this year myself was worth mentioning, I reckon. Some are only interested and mostly fascinated with AI's role and development here, while others are very keen on our permaculture communism, as they call it. Certainly, there are ones who are not impressed by (almost) anything here. Usually, they dislike our lack of medical progress - especially surgery. One guy from Japan was so upset that we don't even have a department that deals with space exploration. This insatiable appetite for constant progress is quite prevalent around the world, as capitalism is still relatively strong. Some still fear anything related to communism and see us as such. Even though some countries worldwide (including the Western ones) are including more and more socialist aspects in their democracy and governance, they will never call it that officially. The Red Scare hasn't left.

After a decade of negotiations and meetings, North and South Korea have finally opened their borders to each other. That is, they have the freedom to travel, but most people from the North can't afford to be tourists. However, they are queuing up big time to emigrate. Many families in the South are accepting the refugees with open arms. The only issue is, and it's a big one, it's certainly hard to get permits and visas, legally, at least.

The final bit of world news - no matter the efforts, the financing and the sacrifices of the workers involved, we are far away from returning the Earth to the pre-industrial levels of global warming. The weather is still mad and unpredictable, and crops often fail (not in Isataion tho) while the refugee crisis has become a staple normality, just like the climate one. Nevertheless, one must try and focus on the improvements that we have made, especially in human rights, which led to corruption decline, and laws being changed and applied, which in turn saved countless lives, not just of our species.

One life worth saving is Bea's, and this year she has been doing better at understanding the "enigmatic aloneness"... She told me she hadn't had any relationships this year, and she's been struggling for the first few months. I help out by sending her book and movie recommendations, plus we spend plenty of time together, just like in the olden golden days. Mom injured her left shoulder while trimming some trees, and that might have been the only way for her to get forced rest. She seems much better now, and can give her powerful hugs again! It was nice spending more alone time with her this year as well - two of my favourite girls in the world!

Men in my life have been all doing good, being quiet and happy, except one. Yes, of course, I mean my BB! He's been so mysterious and avoided many topics in our conversations while seeming paranoid. I gathered that he was either hiding from the local police or the local criminals. In Indonesia, the difference is still minimal between the two. After I started pushing him to leave the NGO and go to a Uni somewhere, anywhere, he said: "I don't care about any of that now. This fight is much more important, and I've got nothing to lose anyway." Aside from being just 22, he has much to lose! Including all of us here... I didn't share this with anyone for their sake, but I don't know what to do or how to help him. I feel utterly powerless.

## Birthday #58

What a lovely, productive and joyful year this was overall. I worked about 20 hours a week. I mainly was teaching and taking care of our elders. I spent more time in the city than on the farms, especially since I did another super fun course on carpentry with Dad in the Pagoda. Time well spent with the old man. I cycled everywhere for eight months, without fail, even in the rain! Others are fine with cycling in November, but I was always anxious about it. I must say I don't miss the city one bit. Almost all my friends live in the Periphery communities, so going to the city almost feels like a chore. It is a beautiful city, but a densely populated city nonetheless. Living in our communities (or villages, as some call them) of up to fifty people is the way to live if I'm to be asked. For Beardy, that's even too much, but he is a rare, introverted breed anyway.

I don't write about him much, and that made me think. I realise now that everything works so normally with him. Not seeing him or messaging him every day has been becoming okay. I had a fear of losing him; I was overly attached at first. He is straightforward, honest and easy-going, so whenever there's a problem or misunderstanding, it gets sorted quickly and painlessly.

However, I am still anxiously attached to Bhumi. I miss him so damn much and worry about his well-being. Yes, I know he's not a little kid anymore, even though he does remind me of this almost every time we talk. I noticed we had fewer catch-ups this year; he says he's busy with his life, but I still feel he's not completely honest with me. I want him back, dammit! It's been so long... Maybe he'll never come back? What if he decides he's done with me, with all of us here in this isolated place? I know it's his own life and his choice, but I would be completely crushed if I'd never see him again.

I did say it has been a nice year - it truly was! There are always waves that oscillate our lives. I just need to work more on my indifference towards opinions. I should keep my empathy but not let any so-called Great Alexanders block my sunshine. I think I need to travel somewhere next year, for a change. I won't go to Indonesia because that could push BB away, but a short change of scenery would do me good. Beardy has stopped complaining about not having

a pet cat since we're constantly surrounded by freed animals here. I think it'll do him good to travel somewhere where there are more different species. Sometimes I think he enjoys spending his time with non-human animals more.

Mom has made so many friends, and I had no idea! Over the past few years, I did notice how it seems like she doesn't see the generation gaps between people. I don't know if my younger students would classify her as cool, but I sure would. It's great to be able to make friends of all ages. I know that has enriched my life, e.g. OG - he has reached lvl.100 in that skill, while Mom's like lvl.88.

I have learnt that Carlo and Bea do text each other and share things amongst themselves, but they never meet up. When I set up a meeting, they always show up and are genuinely happy to see each other. I've always felt so lucky that my friends can be each other's friends, but I don't understand what's holding them back. I know that Bae couldn't possibly "cheat" on me with him anyway.

I've been more involved in the Kvorum again this year, following the political happenings with rediscovered curiosity and activism. The solar and wind upgrades that were getting prepared have been postponed since the current ones are still performing at high efficiency, and the overall energy consumption has been steadily dropping. Our population has also been dropping, but per capita, we are being less wasteful with energy. There's even a plan to shut the LFTR down and build a geothermal power plant instead. This made a tiny minority of the citizens rejoice while the majority were just silently indifferent. It seems that it is true how old fears persist if you ignore them and leave them to rot away.

Globally, people have been coping better with climate change. Coping is still closer to survival than to progress, but everyone is living a better life since world leaders are starting to cooperate properly. The storms, fires, floods and droughts are still very intense, but their severity and frequency have been plateauing.

Reversal is coming very soon, and optimism is higher than ever, motivating people to do a better job, try harder, and live simpler lives. At the same time, those in less fortunate countries can live a more convenient life – all in a proportional measure. The world is more connected than its people think.

## **Birthday #59**

This year has been somewhat different for me as I suddenly got an insatiable hunger for knowledge this February. My lack of socialising did affect my friends and loved ones and even got some of them worried. Most supported me, and some even came over to help with research and practice.

During a long talk with Misha one snug evening on the sofa by the hot stove, as we watched the big, fat, juicy snowflakes stick to the window, I realised how much I depended on others. For example, I can stitch a button on my shirt, but fixing a tear or a rip by hand ends up looking like it's done by a kid that started practising doing things with their feet instead of their hands. Plus, it doesn't last long, and I take it to Mom or the village tailor, both of whom end up shocked or entertained by my shabby attempts.

This was one of the reasons why I fell in love with carpentry and restorations so long ago. But I stopped. I stopped falling in love with skills. I feel there are so many basic ones that anyone can learn well enough to be independent and feel even more confident and useful, especially living in this kind of an off-grid polis or a city-state.

Thus, I have enrolled and, by now, completed not only a sewing course but also one in mechanicals, one in metallurgy and one in plumbing! Electronics are halfway completed, and just tomorrow, my colleague and I need to complete a permanent magnet motor restoration. If someone had told me I'd be repairing my old laundry machine by myself this winter, I would laugh my socks off at them. I genuinely feel unstoppable now! I was always the hardest person to impress, and I have finally impressed myself. I don't mind all those years I spent in journalism, but this is something that is needed for me, first and foremost. Once I get more experience, I could use these new skills to help others or motivate them to do the same.

It already worked on Bea, who has enrolled in electronics with me and is doing amazingly well, one of the fastest learners in the group! Carlo, in turn, did plumbing, which he said he remembered he always wanted, but his dentist dad persuaded him out of it. It turns out his dad's best friend was a plumber and always earned less than him, so duh, any normal father wants his son to be rich, not skilled.

OG, who's way over eighty, is a perfect example. He was a firefighter for most of his (non-criminal) life and enjoyed his job very much. But while in jail, he realised that what he always wanted to do was paint. He showed talent at a young age, but both of his parents dissuaded him from it, probably because "all artists are hungry", and to please his two favourite people, he ended up in an economics university. After getting bored to death during the second year, he quit and became a fireman. A very macho thing to do, but understandable. Yet now, he holds a brush and a palette.

Dad was also like that, not just with me but with himself. I know very little about his parents, but from the few stories I was told, they both seemed very narrow-minded and forceful. It took him decades to get rid of all the BS they forced into his mind, and there's still some left. Of course, he's happier now more than ever. Having kids isn't about making just another copy of yourself!

Purity takes many forms, the rawest one being – a young child. The more we try to help them grow up, we shape them to our liking, which imprints our view towards life onto a helpless sponge of near-infinite energy that trusts us completely. When talking to a child about anything, we should pick our words and descriptions wisely. We mustn't imprint our views of the world onto them. I, of course, try not to do this with my students, who are other people's kids. But parents should be even more careful when it comes to their own child.

Globally, desertification has finally stopped increasing due to strict laws of rotational grazing, permaculture and agroforestry. The irony is how poorer and developing countries made the most considerable progress across all continents. Adaptation was quicker, but implementation was slower, especially in Africa and China, where corruption still exists. Still, people owning their companies is the surest way for individuals not to get drunk on too much power.

Most importantly, the people I love are not too far and are doing well in life. I love Beardy as much as he loves me, which is a whole damn lot! He's as romantic as a boulder, and we don't spend all the time together, but it works for us - it works great, and that is all that matters. Everyone should try to live their life how they want to, but only after discovering who they are. For me, that was and still is the hardest part. I'm not truly sure who exactly I am sometimes.

## Birthday #60

Six decades. Wow. Much time. Very insight. So wisdom... Insert meaningful quote here... Blahdy-blah. Yes, my dear diary, I still don't give a crap about birthdays, but I care about you since I can still find you very useful - for motivation when reading past entries and for inspiration when thinking about the next one. Of course, I still write the random daily ones, but I don't miss this annual one for the world. Not because it's my birthday, but because it has been a tradition. I'm delighted to be alive every day, nonetheless.

As usual, I just read the previous diary entry and found a foreshadowing. And then, just a couple of weeks into this faithful year, me and Misha had an intense conflict. Looking back, it was silly, but we both reacted impulsively and said things we didn't really mean. The crux of the matter was how after I asked him to join me for a few lessons I was having in the city with kids as an assistant, he said, in a seemingly very condescending way, how he'd rather spend a month in a compost pile than a week in a city's classroom. I took this very personally and got hurt, so I instinctively hurt him back with heavy words and an intense tone.

The next day we settled it all and nothing was left undone, but even today, eleven months later, it still makes me think how no relationship is ever "safe". No matter how long we know each other, no matter how much we love and care for one another and no matter how hard we work on our egos, to keep them in check, outbursts like this will happen. It was the first conflict like this that we didn't sort out on the same day. It felt so odd sleeping in the same bed with him that night like I was torn away from my soul, not being able to snuggly cuddle in like we always do. I barely slept, and I remember having very intense dreams that night. The funny thing is, he felt the same that night but was, like me, too stubborn and selfish to make the first move toward reconciliation and forgiveness.

Beardy spent an alarmingly large amount of time with OG and another Chinese grandpa, whose name I (naturally) forgot and will just call Shushu, learning how to fly kites. On many mornings, he would get up before five o'clock to "catch the purest wind". Shushu was adamant about teaching them everything he knew since he felt death

might knock on his door soon – he's 102 years old – but we all think he is very healthy and strong, and we gave him at least 20 years more until that faithful knock. OG says that he started becoming afraid of death just last year, suddenly.

My goodness, my Beatrice aka Bea has never looked sexier! Strange for me to say that now when she just turned 60! She's made some changes to her diet, according to Ayurvedic principles and has been working five times a week, five hours a day, including at least an hour of yoga. She lost all the accumulated fat she planned and toned her muscles to perfection while improving her posture. However, the most potent attraction radiating out of her is her new positive attitude, confidence and calmness. Her dietitian career has already shown improvement along with her clients. She hates when someone calls her customers - clients. Or customers. She prefers to call them people. Of course, she tried getting me to join her this year many times, but to no avail. I did join occasionally, but we all know that "occasionally" gets no results. But honestly, I feel great, healthy, strong and beautiful anyway. I'm optimistic I'll live to see Shushu's age with Misha by my side.

Bhumi has fallen in love! It's a cute, quiet and cheerful Indonesian girl whose English is, sadly, very basic. They were friends only briefly beforehand. She's not into travelling abroad, but Bhumi promised he'd bring her home soon, maybe next year. The best part of all of that is that my dear BB has called this home... When he casually threw that in a sentence, I started crying so much from relief and, of course, joy. He thought it was about him coming back finally, but for me, all my doubts have finally been relieved. The other day he not only said how he misses me, which he always does, but how he misses home more and more. Mom, Dad and Misha are, of course, equally excited about all this and very interested in meeting this mysterious rainforest activist girl that has finally won his shy heart over.

After the UN officially recognized our home as the world's lowest carbon and water footprint sustainable city, we have had a lot of tourism this year. Luckily, there are plenty of empty apartments to place them all and plenty of eager people to be guides. Sadly, most people are interested in a life without money and banks and not so much in our circular economy and simple living.

## **Birthday #61**

Bhumi's back home finally! And just as I gave up on the idea of him coming back. My God, I don't think I ever hugged anyone that hard in my life. He even said the next day that his neck was sore from me missing him so much. He came alone, as I expected, but Dad was disappointed that his girlfriend didn't come. I guess that Dad's traditional side is still alive and kicking (in). I'm not sure whether she couldn't or wouldn't come. I still haven't talked to her, but my boy loves her, she loves him, and that's more than enough for me.

BB's definitely not a boy anymore, as he has adulated entirely over the years. He has been telling us many stories from Indonesia, especially from Borneo. Stories about illegal logging and poaching, palm oil plantations, fearless conservation groups, unbelievably kind and selfless people still living in poverty, black and white magic and, of course, earthquakes and volcanoes. Whenever he starts talking, people stop whatever they are doing and gather to listen immediately. It seems like there is so much more he could share, but while he speaks well, he doesn't like to. Bea managed to upset him when she once called Indonesia "backward". The surprising thing was how quickly she realised her mistake and apologised. This used to take her days to accomplish. Bhumi said recently that he'd go to Indonesia again next year, but he won't stay for another eight years for sure, with a promise. He better not break it!

I've been reading the news on China and how the reforms are taking effect. It doesn't seem like a massive mess anymore, so... I'd love to go there for a trip! From a journalist's perspective, so maybe make a documentary there? We'll see first how the new year starts and goes. Working on the farms, caring for a couple of oldies while teaching a few groups of students is just perfect. All are very regular and consistent but with enough variety. I'm saying that mainly because I need to go (cycle!) to the city and all over the Periphery. I've restored dozens of bronze and brass knobs and handles this autumn, and it was a fun, small, new challenge. I realised that I only haven't worked with glass yet!

I've had an excellent talk with Misha about the perspective on "being old". We've come to the conclusion that you'll probably end up

being the way you imagined yourself when you were younger. The problem is that this picture isn't yours, so many retirees end up acting the same. That's messed up! I still feel (almost) the same desire for life, work, people and the world, to help out and be helpful as I did forty years ago. When the time comes, in four years, I'll choose to keep working. Twenty hours a week is a doddle anyway!

Dad, who's 91, has started slowing down so much that Mom started calling him a tortoise behind his shell... I mean back. But he still does whatever he wants to, even going to seminars and meetups with his old buddies (most of which are still alive and kicking), but he stopped riding the bicycle this year. That's just too risky. However, his demeanour is stellar, so bright and airy, while still making his horrible jokes every single day. Plus, every time I see them together, he seems to love and care for his wifey deeply. He's always been such a strong person, a sturdy pillar to lean on, especially when Mom was changing jobs in rapid succession.

Globally, things have been relatively quiet. Things have stayed the same socially, ecologically and meteorologically like the previous year. Regarding the climate, this consistent inconsistency suggests that the weather changes are plateauing and stabilising. The number of protests, conflicts and prisoners has stayed the same after a trend of constant ups and downs. The data seemed like there were glitches in the system everywhere you looked. I hope it's all downhill from here, in the good sense of the word.

Speaking of prisoners, I almost forgot to mention the trial of one of ours. Maybe it would be better if I did forget because it's a proper kind of ugly. It is truly, sickeningly ugly what this fellow citizen of ours did. This old bastard has drugged a twenty-year-old girl, raped her, recorded it all and posted it on a dark web porn site. No ransom money was asked for because later, it turned out that he got paid in advance for this by people who must have known her. He did this two more times with different and unrelated young girls until he was caught. While awaiting his public trial, he killed himself by slitting his throat. Fucking psycho. I still don't know what to feel about all this madness. I really want to call him a son of a bitch, but I'm sure his father had more influence in bringing him up in such a way to have created such an abusive monster.

## Birthday #62

April truly is the cruellest month. It's the end of the year, yet it is still hard for me to talk or write about it. Dad died. That's a shock in itself, but the way it happened... I'm still confused. I want to process it all and let it go fully, but it just doesn't make any sense to me.

No one knows how they'll go, but everyone has some ideas and wishes. One early morning, just as the sun rose, he woke up suddenly and started gasping for air like he couldn't breathe. He barely managed a few choked words to his bewildered wife next to him – which she pieced together afterwards to be “They got me, get them off me, they're sitting on me...”

Mom was in such a prolonged state of shock. I don't ever remember seeing her petrified for so long. It took over a month until she started speaking properly to the therapist, and he still comes over three times a week. She functions “normally” but is far from her usual self. She has paranoid days where I just can't talk any sense into her, and at those times, she even turns on me with false accusations. I feel so bad for not being there when it happened, but how could I have known? Their neighbour called me as soon as they found out, and within half an hour, I was there, driving that buggy like an utter maniac; thank God there was no one on the roads that morning. I don't want to feel guilty. Yet at least once a day, I do, especially after seeing Mom.

I moved in with her, of course, and am still here. But I feel a fear, the one of losing her as well and not being there for her in her final moments. It was so hard for me to leave her side. I went back to work occasionally, even though everyone told me they could handle the work without me. I need a distraction from my thoughts and the thoughts that she's imprinting in my mind. She thinks that someone killed him. That someone used black magic to send death for him. He was an amazing, caring and loving person. Why would anyone have anything against such a lovely grandpa? It doesn't make sense at all, and I refuse to be a part of Mom's delusions. I understand her fright, but there must be a less mystical explanation. He would get recurring nightmares every so often, which started when he was a teenager, and he possibly had similar episodes not so long ago, like night

terrors, which he didn't share with us. He did always try to look burdensome and impenetrable. Oh, man... It feels so wrong writing about him in the past tense.

Funny how life goes fine one day, and then the next day – you're changed forever. Or, in Dad's case, you're just gone, erased. I'm sure his spirit will go on and reincarnate according to his karma and all that jazz... but the universe is cruel. It seems it just doesn't care one bit about our feelings and plans. This was demonstrated to me so many times in my life, but damn, death is the ultimate prankster. And a horrible one because no one is laughing here.

Everyone quickly forgets how wonderful it is to be healthy until you catch something or get hurt. Just the same, people forget tragedies almost as easily. Unless it's someone they love and care for. For example, no one here is talking about the three girls anymore. I don't know if people have truly forgotten what happened last year or if they're suppressing that tragic memory, consciously or subconsciously. But if you talk to the girls' friends and family, I'm sure as hell they remember everything like no time has passed. Of course, I'm not comparing their suffering to mine, but... whatever, I don't need to explain myself to a diary. Anyway, aside from elderly caretakers, we definitely need plenty more psychotherapists here. There are already plenty enough of doctors and teachers, at least.

Beatrice and Carlo have been so helpful to both of us. Bea does manage to calm Mom down better than I can, but I think it's because Mom didn't start irrationally distrusting her. Not yet, at least... Carlo has been there, and he made me cry so much when he said that Dad was like a dad to him since he had never met his. I know he's not just saying that since I remember when we were dating so long ago, how hard he tried to be liked by him. Not just to get Dad's approval for me but also for himself. I was never sure whether Dad accepted him then, but I like to believe that he did but just played tough cookie. They both have similar characters and interests. Or had? Fuck, I don't even know anymore...

Bhumi's flight to Indonesia was scheduled in early May, and we told him that he should go and that we were lucky that he was here while he was. But to be completely honest, I wish he didn't leave... And yes, it's for selfish reasons! Thank goodness Beardy is near.

## **Birthday #63**

I'm doing okay, I really am. There are haphazard waves of emotional amplitude, but overall, I'm okay. I'm pretty sure I've chewed and processed it all well. However, it still pains me to see Mom alone. I've gotten used to seeing them together, especially since they had become inseparable over the years. She's doing much better, but she tells me that, at times, she hears him talking to her...

Working helped immensely – I was teaching a few lessons a week on the farms and caring for two lonely oldies, plus my Mom. This summer, before the harvests, I spent in city maintenance again. I missed the job itself and the amazing team spirit that exudes from the plethora of personalities one can see there.

Looking back, I don't think I'd handled everything as well last year if Misha weren't there for me the whole time. His attitude towards death is inspiring and comforting, but only once you understand it. I remember talking about "returning people" a long time ago, and I thought he was just weird and that he needed to deal with death better. I was the one who was mistaken the whole time, my whole life. No one is ours! Even our own body is a loner. Dad was never mine or anyone's.

Carlo is the one who helped Mom the most. I'd say even more than the therapist. He's been spending much time with her, talking about Dad, parenthood and not having kids, loneliness and solitude... and about mourning. I remember talking about those subjects with him over time, but he managed to hit the spot with Mom because his approach is less personal than mine. I think that she sees in him her son, which in turn could mean that she sees a bit of Dad in him. She's getting old, but she doesn't have any symptoms of dementia; she's just very sentimental. She's always been like that. I'm just like her in that sense, so we both get hurt easily. And too attached.

I got pained by seeing Misha hug one of the women from the nearby community. It wasn't a quick hug but a proper, long, squeeze one. You know, the one where there's no room for the Holy Spirit in between. I was equally stunned by the sudden jealousy I felt, which I think I had never felt before. Misha, of course, started laughing and

then realized I was not joking, which made him sit me down and explain his perspective very seriously.

However, after he asked me whether my reaction would be the same if she weren't a hot, single, younger mom... Well, let's just say that I stopped arguing right there. It seems that I started doubting my appearance subconsciously because I neglected it since this whole tragedy happened. Also, I am afraid of losing my other loved ones.

One of them is Beatrice, who, just when I start to think that I can't love and respect more, proves me wrong and outdoes herself. One of many examples from this year can be how she challenged herself to become a waitress – which she did almost effortlessly. Naturally, she's an outgoing, charismatic extrovert, so it is no surprise, but her youthful spirit and ravenous curiosity are still as strong as ever, since she was five. I appreciate how she tries to calm herself down more recently around Mom and me when she starts talking about something she's passionate about. She was never so considerate when we were younger, no sir, far from it.

Bhumi is doing okay abroad, and his lady is taking good care of him, judging by his smile and energy whenever we do a video talk, which we do once a month. I didn't want to push for more often, and he announced that he'd be back next year anyway. However, there's still no mention of Jenny (her English name) coming with him. She might never be returning, and she wants BB to stay there... forever? That better not be the plan because imma fly over there and wrench my boy out of her sticky hands for good. I wouldn't do that. But I could. You betcha bottom crypto-coin I could.

Finally, after a couple of years of “peace”, another calamity struck our city. Not the weather, which was relatively stable this year, but the killing of people. There was a terrorist attack at our main gate, with a truck full of homemade explosives and some biohazard gas made with old pesticides. In total, 43 people got killed, and many more were injured while the bio-weapon remains are still being tracked and cleaned up from the surrounding area.

By the way, all this happened in March. I'm reporting it in a cold, state-funded-journalist way because, after my personal roller-coaster, I've been running low on emotions lately. Let's see if the new year can bring some new, fresh energy into my life.

## **Birthday #64**

This June, during a sudden heat wave that we were having, Mom started having breathing difficulties. At first, she avoided me and kept it a secret, but I smelt something irregular. Since she was always a lousy liar, I decided to give her a surprise visit. She then told me she would join Dad very soon and that he was waiting for her. I naturally thought she was being overly dramatic again, but after the doctor's visit and tests, it turned out her lungs were collapsing.

I wanted to let BB know, but then I thought of sparing him the worry and pain. Now I think that I should've told him the truth then. Mom died in a hospital at the beginning of July. The machines had tried to keep her alive, but she really needed to go. Thus, she indeed joined Dad.

I guess the death of the "second" parent is less painful since I was kinda expecting it. Mom was becoming reclusive since last winter and seemed gloomy and absorbed in her thoughts. Maybe I could've stepped in earlier and been more aggressive with her. I didn't want to push her with anything ever since Dad died because I wanted her to take it easy with her life. Nevertheless, I think that this was my other mistake of the year, a big one.

Bea, Carlo and Misha were shocked by all this since they didn't notice her fading away slowly as sadness consumed her bit by bit. Well, Beardy was probably surprised for ten seconds since he generally isn't shocked by anything. They were all supportive and lovely, and Bae even wanted to move in with me for a while, but after a lot of pressure from her, I caved in and allowed her to move into my community, but not with me. A proper compromise, that was.

Bhumi (who's almost 30, by the way) was so upset that I hadn't told him, but during those few weeks, there was a volcanic eruption in Sumatra, so all flights were paused anyway. Once the coast was clear, BB took the first flight and arrived just a week after her burial. I'm still unsure why I decided not to tell him when she became ill... If it were me, I would definitely like to be told. He was very attached to her, and by the time she was in hospital, it was clear that it was inevitable. He told me several times that he had forgiven me for this. But I don't know whether I can still forgive myself. I know that

“could’ve/should’ve” thoughts are pointless, but guilt is a deep-rooted and clingy emotion to remove. The only good thing is that this time, his girlfriend came with him, which surprised everyone, including her. She didn’t seem forced, but I guess she imagined this place and us all very differently. She’s nice but very closed towards us, and it’ll take time for me to get to know and see through her.

Next year I’m allowed to retire from working, but I don’t want to. I took June and July off and was happy to be back working with students and the city maintenance crew in August. I must say that taking care of the oldies feels different now, once my own two oldies are gone. The emotions are conflicting and paradoxical. I feel I can give myself more to them now and treat them with more love. However, it’s so hard to be happy around them. I feel so empty, still. I have to fake most smiles and pretend that I’m fine. I hate when people do that to me, and look at me now, doing the same to others. This is a recurring theme of this year, it seems, trying to help others and fucking it all up instead.

There were three terrorist attacks this year in the whole world; can you believe that? The last year (which was very rainy) was the same. It was just like before the 1970s when terrorist attacks weren’t “invented” yet. Because of the rains last year, a significant increase in wildlife occurred here – mammals, birds, reptiles and arthropods. One of the council members got kicked out with a unanimous vote. The AI suggested this, and the evidence was irrefutable once an investigation was completed. This guy was an engineer, but he was a great manipulator and managed to lobby and persuade a few council members to re-open a production line that wasn’t so important. His son worked there after he was in charge of the whole operation. So, even when there’s no profit to be made, people still want to try to cheat to gain something that only suits themselves or their families.

Dammit, there’s still some space left on the page. I guess the rant I was trying to hold back has to come out of me... Just as I’m about to retire and am able to take care of my parents, they’re too old to be alive. The first milestone was finishing schooling, the second one was getting married and having kids, and this was supposed to be the third one? Something’s terribly wrong with our modern life. Also, were people having kids because they were afraid of being alone?

## **Birthday #65**

Usually, I try to be as objective as I can here, especially in regard to balancing out the ups and the downs in equal amounts, preferably. I guess that the true journalist in me is not giving up after all. However, since the last few entries (well, and years of my life) were dark and painful, I'll try to balance it out by zooming out more on this year and selecting the stories that were... brighter. I read the previous entry every time, and after reading the last one, I got so sad that I just couldn't write. Two hours later, here I am at the old outdoor table outside my house, but with a new mission.

I needed a change this year, and since I haven't travelled anywhere in a long while, I went to Europe - to Germany for the first time. Misha helped me out so much with the annoying bureaucratic work that I just did the retina scans and fingerprints like some big, fat, lazy company boss. And he said the whole process is simplified since they've deleted borders and traditional passports. I can't even bear to imagine how it was before, a few decades ago, when the first massive refugee crisis started.

I spent six months there with a team of students and scientists, training crows, ravens and an occasional magpie to collect small litter, especially cigarette buds and small pieces of plastic still strewn across cities and towns. After the very successful experiment, we had to stop any further training because next year, these wild animals might not return to do the wild animals' things that they evolved to do. Meeting new people of all ages was fun, and answering a million questions about Isataion and life without money. One girl asked how we do our burials/plantings without graveyards. Her mom's eyebrows lifted as high as her eyes squinted.

I must say that Europe is doing much better compared to before I was there. After the EU started losing power and becoming more decentralised, with more freedom of movement being implemented, every community I have seen has become more... colourful. I remember seeing so much segregation the last time I travelled across it, to Spain. The law that mandated the mixing of races, nationalities and income levels was a major turning point in so many cultural and economic aspects. Of course, using a circular economy made huge

changes as well. The quality of all products I've seen there is almost the same as ours here, and hand-made artisanal items are appreciated everywhere.

While I was abroad, the never-bored Beardy devised a cunning plan for us to make a cycling trip across Europe, but not next year. We should start training and getting experience and do it before we're old(er). I was super excited when he told me that, but my second thoughts were the opposite. I still think that something like that is way above my fitness level. He says it's only above my adventurous attitude level. If he meant that I needed a change of attitude, oh boy, he's got another thing coming! I'm just kidding; I know he's right (like always!), but it's easier said than done. I can't afford to skip training!

Bhumi and Jenny had a change of heart; just as I was returning from Germany, they decided to move out of "my" house and into an apartment in the city. He didn't say it, but I know it was all her idea. However, I must say that they spend a lot of time here, in the Periphery, almost every weekend. She's been learning both English and Esperanto (which has become somewhat popular here) and will soon apply for our citizenship. They're both nervous about that, but I think they'll get it. A partner from a young couple almost always gets in. I'm slowly getting closer to Jenny, and I think I like her thus far. More research is necessary.

Carlo managed to make a young lady pergenat! She isn't his girlfriend, but they were having something, that's for sure. She's almost twenty years younger than him, and it's her first "accident" like this. Carlo is happy about the baby, but she's considering an abortion. I'll call him next week to see what's her decision.

There was a tragic event this year, just last month. One very troubled and reclusive person killed himself in their bathroom. He was undergoing weekly counselling and was monitored almost daily, but still, he just didn't want to be happy. That's what his neighbour said on the news. Perhaps our medical tracking system needs an overhaul? AI does make mistakes occasionally. Loneliness can kill. But at least our crime rate is near zero.

I've started feeling like that again... I miss Mom and Dad. It's weird not seeing them around, not hugging them, and even not writing about them here. So... I just go and hug two young trees very often.

## Birthday #66

Jenny got citizenship, yay! She aced all tests except the English one, which means she's become fluent in Esperanto in one year. Her English hasn't really improved, even though she uses it as much as Esperanto. But it's been hard to get through to her all this time she's been here. She's lovely and polite but too quiet and reclusive. She rarely asks anyone anything at all. Of course, she's so comfortable around Bhumi, but she closes down as soon as someone else joins them. BB says she's just shy, but this is more than simple shyness, especially since they're both over thirty.

He's been very busy himself, getting involved in many social projects worldwide, but it seems he's not so happy to be working remotely. I don't know if I should say he's a workaholic or just works too much. He visits every weekend and often sleeps over nearby. One lovely warm evening in August, he called me mom, which surprised me so much I couldn't react at all.

Only after I got back to my house, the response kicked in. It wasn't only happy tears coming down my face as I thought about Mom and how much she meant to him and me. I'd like to think that Jenny suggested him to call me like that.

Carlo's enthusiasm about the baby faded quickly as soon as the little bugger started wailing at night, asking for food and attention. He sometimes looks terrified and confused, even though they both passed their parenting test. Yet, he still "clocks in" the hours and is around when needed, so I'm very proud of him! I'm sure they will all do just fine. He and his young girlfriend seem to be a great match, regardless of their age difference.

Another surprise was Bea, who loves spending time with his baby, not just Carlo's - with other ones in the village nursery too! She's always been terrified of any bipedal that couldn't speak. It seems like this changed in the meantime, and I didn't notice. I feel like a bad friend for not noticing these changes in her. Perhaps it's just the guilty (sub)conscience, as I'm not spending as much time with her as I used to, as I could, or... as I'd want to.

All this has started me thinking about being a "real" biological mom. This autumn was quite rainy, both in the meteorological and

emotional sense. Now it looks more like I had an existential crisis. Was I being so selfish by not wanting kids? Was I wasting my life, going against my body and evolution? Perhaps I did want kids after all, but I pushed this into my subconscious? Have I at least done enough with my own life instead to make it worthwhile? Being a teacher to others' kids isn't the same thing, no matter what I'd tell myself.

After a month or so of this torture, I calmed down and agreed that I could still contribute, and even if they're other people's kids, it counts for something. I still remember all the good teachers I had in school and feel the impact they had on my life. Beardy, of course, helped me with this, being a realist and a constant anchor to the present. I can stop overthinking, but sometimes, I just need him to remind me when I lose my shit. It doesn't need to be a lot. I don't want to live in the past or hope for a future that doesn't exist. "Present is the only real" has been my (his) go-to mantra.

I don't want to be a retiree yet! I've worked with students again and got my hands busy with restorations, but I think I'm done with elderly care. I mean, pretty soon, I'm gonna be the one who will need care from someone younger, hopefully. When old folks start taking care of old folks, I will pronounce our society completely FUBARed.

Some of the city buildings, after almost seventy years, are starting to look tired, I'd say. Hiding the annual renovation attempts is impossible, but this is mostly aesthetic; structurally, they're still very sound. Hey, I look a bit wonky myself, so what? I can still climb a tree and pick peaches from the top canopy. And just like me, the Periphery buildings and houses carry the aged patina well. Misha still compliments me almost regularly, but still genuinely and simply, like he always used to.

Khawlan city (in Libya) has been officially acknowledged as a successful experiment, so we have re-started considering going there for a few months. It's still growing and spreading, but just like the Periphery, it doesn't matter because you don't feel the density in a place like this. African Union is almost completely self-reliant in materials, products, brains... lots of exports! Ex-colonists have finally and literally paid back the promised debts, so forty years of "donations" paid off for everyone, once the Africans lived a better-quality life that was restricted from them.

## **Birthday #67**

I honestly don't remember the last time I spent my birthday abroad... I'm in Libya with Misha! We finally got around to travelling here, using more trains than buses. The journey itself was an adventure, but I'll get to all that in a bit; I like adding my thoughts here chronologically if I can.

After the new year, I suddenly decided I needed work, proper work. Consequently, I got busy right away with teaching, but the restorations kept coming and coming and coming... At one point, the workshop looked like a dump or some mad hoarder's cave. Most of the fancy furniture was coming from Russia, where the government was slowly uncovering Putin's hidden art collections from the days of the empire, some even from the 19th century, hidden by the communists as well. My team restored them all before winter and returned everything to Russian museums.

So that was what preoccupied me this year. Even though, at times, I was feeling exhausted, my hands bruised and bloody, it felt great to work hard. I mean, 30 hours a week would've been laughed at 50 years ago, but right now, that's not little for us here. Beardy was worried I was too old for this kind of intensity. Hah! I so proved him wrong! Of course, I'll take it easy next year, but I feel loads of... stuff... has come out this year through my hands and my work. I can confidently say that I feel healed and at peace with death, with "God's mysterious ways", and what I think justice is.

Khawlan is such a welcomed vacation for Misha and me. Not just because we were very busy this year, but also because the winters here are just superb! We're both surprised at the humidity levels here, even though we're in the slight rain shadow of the mountains, but the temperatures and the wind are perfect! If you disregard the constant sand particles between your teeth and in your tear ducts. We've been here for a month and must leave in a couple of weeks. It'll be hard to go back to the real winter back home. Maybe we just stay here and make it a new home?

Of course, we won't, especially Misha. He's already missing his mountains and the steppe. I must admit I miss BB the most, especially since this year he's been going through a lot, ever since Jenny talked

to him about marriage and kids. Everyone, including himself, was surprised at this. To her, this seems the logical next step. Or perhaps that's why she came there in the first place. I still don't trust her fully, so I support Bhumi in his declining both offers. Perhaps I'm a hypocrite, especially since I get second doubts about my questionable parenthood choices every once in a while. Whatever BB decides, I stand behind it, regardless.

We had a lovely, long video call with Bea and Carlo a couple of days ago. They're both doing great, but after we've told them all the stories about our living here, they said quite seriously that they'd also come next year. Together! What else am I missing? The two of them seem to have become proper friends over the past few years. That always made sense to me, and I've been trying to get them to hang out, but it never worked out. Until I gave up, naturally.

In any case, I'm so happy for them and their trip. I'm unsure if that is fair towards his girlfriend and their baby. I know that a few times before, she would go off and leave the baby with him, but only for a few days. By now, it has become entirely normal to take care of your neighbour's baby, even when breastfeeding is needed. With all the certifications and mutual feedback, finding a trustworthy and experienced person is easy.

I realized I neglected OG for a while now, and he deserves a passage, at least. Earlier this spring, Carlo teased him about how he's slowing down and getting old, but he defended by saying he's working slower consciously. Of course, we didn't believe him, and naturally, this triggered a demonstration. The next day he showed us all how he could move twice more wheelbarrows while, naturally, getting tired and sweaty and blistering his hands. This 91-year-old impressed us all! After working my ass off this year, this philosophy of his really got me thinking. I should try it out long-term.

What else... yes, the world news! I'll just point out that we're now below 250 PPMs, and India has finally reached net zero this year, even though their population is still increasing. The caste system is almost fully dismantled, yet some residual stigma exists around it. The international bill of non-human animal rights was almost passed this year at the UN summit. I think next year will finally be the one - so opposable digits crossed!

## Birthday #68

This crazy year started off usually with me going to work maybe ten hours a week, Misha - I'd say double that. And as spring started thawing, the drowsy winter lethargy and everyone started easing into the year... Encephalitis lethargica (EL) hit us out of nowhere!

I don't want to call it a pandemic because it was over so quickly that the medical and emergency institutions had no idea what was happening. This "Sleeping Sickness" wiped away thousands of lives of all ages, genders and creeds. The scariest part, for me at least, is how quickly the 40.000 got infected. The doctors say, comparing the first outbreak at the beginning of the last century, the survival rate is twice higher, but going from a survival rate of 1 in 2 to 1 in 4 is not a comforting prospect. The "lucky" people that survived never fully recovered. They're different people having very different lives now. It's like almost everything you were, just died. It's like trading in your RPG character, on which you worked for hundreds of hours, for a level 2 noob. A fungal medicine helped out (together with the ball-tossing trick), but we were so lucky it just stopped spreading for some inexplicable reason, thank God!

I've never been scared about any pandemic before, or any sickness for that matter (except that scare with Bea a long time ago), but I was shit-scared of this, man... Turning people into fucking useless piles of flesh, fat and bones. Doctors and AI were utterly useless, scratching their bald heads and nano-transistors. The messed-up thing is that all the people I know from here that got it... they were all... let's just say, not nice. Some of them were truly proper selfish scumbags. I think that the fitness and health level that one has achieved didn't mean shit to this... karmic plague.

All this aside, this was almost a nice year... Beatrice and Carlo wouldn't agree because their yearly trip plan to Khawlan was ruined. At least they stuck around to "take care" of our OG. He managed to somehow, in a way that only he knew how to get through to Jenny. There were just a few of us when he gave her a speech worthy of an award or something. I wish someone had recorded it. In just a few minutes, he condensed the history and the effect of patriarchy on women worldwide and how far the sticky, slimy tentacles of

indoctrination go. Jenny's clever; I know that she knew most of those facts, but sometimes, someone needs to lay things down in front of you so that they can stare back at your stupid face. Until you fucking do something about it, finally. She has not only dropped the baby (idea, not the baby - never drop a baby!) but also started questioning everything. Bhumi says she often goes to OG to talk and ask questions. I'm kind of jealous because I hoped to be the one that melts her masks and gets to her heart. BB is so relieved and has made instant life-long friend with OG. But it hurts me to see her suffering and feeling so down and reclusive most of the time. I guess she just has to go through that... dark, bumpy tunnel.

There are more nice things to write about! After the month-long "pandemic" stopped suddenly, I waited a month more and reminded Beardy of the bike trip we've always wanted to do. I felt so giddy, brave, and ready to persuade him, but he just smiled and said, "Hell yeah!" He is so hard to impress and catch off guard. I guess that I should love that about him? We organised everything within a week of this talk, got on a train to St. Petersburg and rented an electric motorbike from there.

Since it was summer, the original plan was to only go to campsites and sleep in our tent. I managed that well... for three weeks. After that, I desired a square room with walls and ceilings, like I never did. It seems life has spoiled me, and I'm not as tough as I used to be. Beardy insisted on not cheating, so occasionally we slept apart, I in a room- he in the tent. We went down to Portugal and came back across the Mediterranean and up the Dinaric Alps.

I noticed how different life is in the Balkans - I thought it'd never get better there. From the whole trip, the variety of natural landscapes was the best; it's so wild and free, just like the people. They seemed much less frustrated, anxious and troubled than I remembered them many years ago. Plus, no more litter and cigarettes!

Coming back here, where home is, felt so good - our cosy simplicity here is unparalleled anywhere, and it heals the mind. However, Beardy went on a two-week trip to the Aral Sea suddenly. It seemed like I had suffocated him. He's so used to his freedom, and I know I need to respect it, just like my own, but... It's hard! And just as I fell romantically in love with him all over again.

## Birthday #69

Let's start with world news – the EL has been long gone, but still, so many people that have been saved and woken up are not functioning... properly. The culprit behind this and the proper cure are all unknown. The coast is clear for the rest of us, but who knows when it will strike next time?

The Animal Rights Act has been passed, which is excellent news, but many clauses have exceptions. I fear that because of them, many people will still (ab)use animals in one way or another. Only the class of mammals is fully protected, but this is just one step towards the human race's evolution and fulfilling our collective purpose. A part of that is, giving them the right and freedom to live. But that's just the silly ol' idealist me speaking.

Last winter, there was one freezing day when not a single person from our entire city-state used public transport except bicycles and, of course, their feet. This happens often throughout the year, but this year was the first time that it happened during a cold and snowy day. Usually, people take buses and an occasional taxi, but it seems we're getting tougher over time. Less lazy too.

When I teach students, it's usually at the farms, rarely in the city. But in that case, I don't hang around. I come in, blow away children's minds and leave in peace, on an e-bike. One day this autumn, I stuck around to check out some new equipment they got. The tech was handy, but after observing a few lessons, I was shocked to see how much the educational system and its approach have changed - especially the primary school. Things seem so utterly chaotic to me! I then remembered how Dad said the same thing when he came to my classroom 60 years ago. Holy shit, I'm almost 70 already...

However, that's still 23 years less than our beloved OG. He's now famous in Indonesia! Jenny and Bhumi have made a vlog about him, and it just exploded. The migration department got thousands of applications from Indonesia soon after the whole thing took off. All this benefited Jenny the most, taking her out of the shell she was hiding in. But honestly, I think Bhumi played a role in that. He should've been more understanding and helpful last year when she was down. She even told me this herself, while Bhumi kept saying

everything was alright. I'm very disappointed in him. I know he isn't selfish, but why would he be so cold to her? I think he might have damaged their relationship last year more than she did before that when she obsessed about kids. As soon as she started nursing kids from the community, it was apparent she felt better. But BB didn't suggest that - it was OG's idea. Yet, I can see that she still would love to have his child. Oh man, it's such a odd situation they got themselves in.

At least Bea's and Carlo's friendship is going strong, or better yet stronger than ever, I'd say! They finally made their trip to the Khawlan; they stayed for a couple of months and came back... unimpressed. I'm not sure what they expected, consciously or subconsciously, but they had a "meh" time. October was too hot still, but November was excellent, especially compared to our Novembers! At least we all agreed that the Mediterranean Sea is amazing there. They hated the sand in the air, but Beardy and I were okay with it. I guess it's just different strokes for different folks.

I had a lovely picnic with Carlo while I was visiting my parents' trees. We accidentally met on the way and took a different route. Then, suddenly, we both realized that we were near OUR tree! I visit it sometimes but by myself. Of course, we had to go to it together! I had some food in the backpack, and he had some wine he was about to return. That summer evening was warm, so we stayed up late there (for me, 11 pm is late) and had lots of laughs as he told me about Bae. He told me that when she got drunk one night on the beach with him, she was... "surprisingly affectionate" towards him. She didn't mention anything the next day, so she maybe doesn't recall it?

And lastly, something about myself - I am now a certified bicycle technician! I did a course this year and spent 500 hours maintaining, repairing, and restoring some classic bicycles. I wish I had done this sooner; it just suited me so perfectly! The time worked well because Misha was away during summer, on a trip to the Ural Mountains, via the river. I was missing him loads, but I let him be. When he came back, he was obviously delighted to see me and seemed happier in general. Last year he was a bit... cloudy. I think he should go as often as he wants, but he's unsure. I don't want to be the one that obstructs his or anyone's freedom.

## Birthday #70

When OG told Jenny about his childhood a few weeks ago, I realized I didn't know so many details about him, so I'll share them here. And to remind myself next year as well.

His dad was an Iraqi Kurd, while his mom was an atheist Iranian. Obviously, that marriage was going against the grain from the start. However, she didn't want to abort, and he respected her choice. Even though they both tried and worked hard, they always remained slightly above poverty. When little Leo was 13, his dad's brother had a heated argument with his mother, which turned into a fight, which ended up with her being shot on the floor, where she bled to death. Leo's life didn't get easier from there. He moved to war-torn Azerbaijan, where he spent a chunk of his life on the streets, washing cars, as his dad stopped calling and disappeared completely, never to be heard from again. When he was eighteen, he got into punk and had to escape to Russia, where he got into a whole lot of stupid shit, which got him absurdly rich and unexpectedly influential. Eventually, He managed to get himself locked up near Grozny, where he got clean and sober and decided to give "normality" a chance. From there, he ended up here, and the rest is... well, rather boring.

What else was rather boring? My life this year. Well, not really, though; I just didn't work at all. Aside from the communal hour, of course. I went to many exhibitions and concerts and made some new, amazing friends. But because I didn't feel so useful, I couldn't fully enjoy my everyday life. Is this a curse or a blessing? In any case, I'll definitely do some work next year, even if it's like five hours a week.

Misha is spending more time away. This year he was all over the Caucasus mountains, helping local farmers and ecologists. I must salute him for his consistency in video calls; he'd always find time for them somehow. He knows that even though I don't push him or complain, I still need someone close to talk to. From all the other close friends in my life, I can literally tell him anything, and I know that he will never judge or react too emotionally. When he came back a couple of months ago, he shocked me to death by bringing a gift that he made, which is beautiful and complex... and romantic!!! He collected

fallen leaves, cones and lichen from the places he visited and made a lovely sculpture, which now stands proudly on this very desk.

Beatrice and Carlo's newfound friendship and closeness turned a bit south, or downhill, or went backwards... well, you get the point. She, especially, has less patience (which is needed a lot with him), primarily when he gets offended and starts pouting, like a little overly-attached boy. Essentially, they act like two primary school kids developing a crush on one other... It's quite puzzling but cute and amusing to observe.

Bhumi and Jenny, on the other hand, had a crash, not a crush. Not a physical actual one, but, you know, an emotionally charged one. The one whose bruises and scars take much longer to heal. They had a falling out one night, and he told her he was not interested at all in returning to Indonesia; like ever, he was done with it. She told me how shocking that was to her, and I understand. I was also surprised by how he feels about his home country. Jenny naively continues to believe that he didn't mean it and that they will travel back there sometimes. They are both very emotionally immature people...

The world continues to change for the better; it must be said and praised. China's messy (and bloody!) period of multi-party democracy is over, and things have settled down and work much better. The way their government and democracy are organized is very similar to what we have here, except that AI has a much bigger say in decision-making and that it's almost completely unsupervised.

One of the micro-factories here has started producing humanoid robots, which are much more sophisticated and useful than the ones we've been using so far, small clunky ones and the big chunky ones for tough and dangerous jobs. We're not afraid of the AI becoming "sentient" soon, but the focus is on the impact on our lives. We use machines to help us, but not to stupify or make us lazy. There's so much that we can do by ourselves that we ought to! For example, most of the farming jobs are done by us, but our tools have been improved, like the electrically assisted wheelbarrows. In total, almost half of all labour hours in Isataion are spent on food production and ecosystem management. Even though many still call us backwards and conservative, we're the ones that eat well and sleep well without pills or even neural genetic modifications.

## **Birthday #71**

It was definitely a good call I made this year to work a bit (approx. 7 hours) every week instead of jumping on a project for a month where I need to spend seven hours a day and then get bored for the other idle months. I got into... well, everything. I refreshed it all from my professional Resume! That includes working on photography, pottery, carpentry, metal restorations, simple electronics, journalism, teaching permaculture and ecology and, of course, elderly care. I spent eighty hours on city maintenance as well; how could I forget that, yeesh! I remember how Mom used to say her working day was just fine, while she worked the same number of hours in a day as I did now per week. Yes, I'm a post-retiree, but still, it's crazy how much toil people used to load onto themselves and accept it as reality, as something that must be done for our species' survival.

Recently, I remembered how naked our city looked and how buildings seemed taller because all the trees were young, 70 years ago. In one album, I saw Dad's seedling from his burial. It's been almost ten years since we planted it, and if you compare it to other trees near it, of course, it doesn't look tall, but compared to a seedling, it's grown so much! I visit their trees at least once a season anyway, but seeing some old photos certainly puts the present into a different perspective. Just imagine the resources and space we would need to have now in order to have buried everyone over these seventy-ish years in stupid wooden, metal and concrete graves with fancy tombstones. Of course, I still miss my parents, but I feel I have completely come to terms with death. Not just theirs but my own as well. "Dear all, the end is nigh. Regards, Entropy"

Misha's been abroad again more than he was here, but that's totally fine with me. I'm learning better how to enjoy living by myself, and I just need to keep the slight OCD bursts in check. But would I enjoy solitude so much if I didn't know whether he would be coming back? The subconscious is a deep, dark and mysterious chasm where a Balrog dwells, waiting for us to be triggered so we can fall in.

Carlo has been having some problems with his partner, which he doesn't want to share with anyone. At the same time, he has started being more reclusive and spending time indoors - according to him,

because of his little girl (six already!) and books. But he's always been outdoorsy, just like Bea; even winter wouldn't stop them. They'd put on their winter coats and boots, clean the snow from the table and chairs and bring out their breakfast, even in below-freezing weather. I understand we're getting old, but Bea, for example, isn't showing any signs of slowing down. I must say how great a job she's doing with the girl, being one heck of a grandma. She stood up to the job of parenting, and I dare say even more so than the girl's mom. Together with OG, which I guess would be considered a great-grandpa since he's turned ninety-five this year, everyone's pitching in to help Carlo out. Yet, he's still busy with something...

Bhumi and Jenny have grown colder towards each other. It's so obvious, which of course, makes me so sad, especially since I don't know how to help them. Bhumi completely ignores the whole affair, saying everything's just fine. He's just like that dog meme.

Not everything is fine in our schools either. There have been rumours and even proper investigations into teenage "Fight clubs", as some kids have been having constant bruises, wounds and even severe injuries. Some girls as well! No one's still admitting anything, but I think it's just a matter of time before the truth comes out. Madness... I guess the devil does find employment for the idle.

I don't know how to feel about this system in general. Sometimes, like now, I'm for more strict laws, restrictions and punishments because of these kids. But other times, I feel the laws have created these problems. Perhaps any act of taking away someone's freedom, even if they're just twelve years old, creates an equal and opposite reaction. Maybe teenagers would never have the rebellious phase if they were just left to their own devices while they were younger? You don't want to go to primary school? Fine, knock yourself out. I'm sure parents won't agree with me on this, but I don't entirely agree with myself either; I'm just looking for another way, a solution.

We did make massive progress in eradicating consumerism - my phone's 15 years old, my PC's bones are 20, and my vacuum cleaner still has lots of parts that are 60. But educational progress could've been better. This comes from a teacher and not from a parent, but I'm sure many local parents would agree. Not everyone's into anarchy, but everyone likes freedom, no?

## **Birthday #72**

Misha has invited me to join him on one of his trips in May. I wished he would do that, but I didn't want to ask him whether or not I could tag along. If he'd say yes, I might feel that he was pressured, but if he'd say no, I'd feel devastated. So, I just waited patiently, and it happened. But am I being too nice and too selfless?

We took a long boat trip from the Caspian Sea up the Ural River until we reached the mountains and the "Wall of Stone", as he calls it. When he first told me he wouldn't be using any GPS equipment or maps, I objected furiously and felt quite scared. When he said, "This is why I don't invite you to join me in my travels. You're still too afraid to let go and trust your spontaneity and allow intuition to take the reins", that hit deep, and I just couldn't argue against that. Of course, I was still hurt and afraid, but he was right.

That's what almost ruined the friendship between BB and me. When, one night, I started talking about him spending so much time far away, he convinced me that, he would come back on a moment's notice if he was really needed. That "really" sparked a whole other, hours-long conversation. But anyway, the trip was fantastic! We had the much-needed bonding and got to understand each other even better. But somehow, I have a feeling he won't invite me next year.

When we came back in August, I decided to move to a forester's cabin for a month for some deep thought-cleansing retreat. Beary was there for the first few days to help me settle in and get supplies, but I spent three weeks alone. He hurried off to the Altay Mountains in order to get back before the snow hit. I had no internet, electricity or any connections to the outside world, aside from the emergency power bank and the phone, which I didn't use, luckily. I met seven people during my forest walks and barely managed to squeeze out a hello to them.

Jenny travelled back to Indonesia to gather herself early this year. Last month, I had an intense conversation with Bhumi to stop bullshitting me, everyone, and most importantly himself. Pretending things are fine doesn't do anything except make the situation worse. He's so brave and organised when it comes to... well, everything except his relationships. I must admit that I did call him an emo, but I

apologised afterwards. I felt he needed a figurative slap to snap him out of his pathetic lethargy. Until last month, I was advising him to try hard to save the relationship, but recently, I've been telling him to call it quits and move on with his life. He says he'll wait some more in order to come to a decision. Let's see how many wasted years that will take.

Even OG told him the same while he was away in Norway all summer, soaking himself in a true Nordic spa. When Misha went to the Altay, Carlo, his partner and their kid tagged along for the train ride, they proceeded towards Mongolia and ended up at Baikal Lake. Carlo's descriptions and photos mesmerised Bea instantly, so when they all came back in November, she took off. Even though the winter was in full swing there, she managed everything well and improvised spontaneously. (See?!) She just told me last week how she's in love with a Buryat shaman and how it was all meant to be somehow. She was apparently expecting her. Jeez Louise!

What wasn't expected was a slight increase in fresh mea... I mean immigrants, which was much needed as the birth rate here, has been on a steady decline. Basically, if there hadn't been immigrants coming in each year, we would have maybe a third of "our" population. Many people left temporarily to volunteer in Greece and Turkey to aid the relief efforts since they were hit badly by a major (8.0 magnitude!) earthquake. Thousands of lives have been lost, but if an event like this had happened just twenty years earlier, the number would've been easily tens of thousands. The destruction is unreal. I'm struggling even to watch the news.

This all happened at the same time as the newly formed Global Space Agency redirected some tax money towards the continuation of space exploration and the old projects that were put on pause for decades. Since the technology has improved in the meantime, the proposed uncrewed telescope station on the far side of the Moon will cost a tenth of the original price. Nanotech and DNA research is to speed up, for example. But patents are to be no more soon! When disasters hit, tech giants need to shut up. Most live so high up in their heads, forgetting about their hearts, priorities and the public good. I think emotional intelligence is needed much more today than the intellectual one.

## **Birthday #73**

The dam can't hold back the pressure... It will burst and release the rant at any moment... I must... first write about the important things... that happened to me... and my loved ones in this year... while there's still time... I can only hold it for a bit longer... Aaargh!

Beatrice is back! She's so happy and radiates joy, especially as she shares her mystical stories from Baikal Lake and Olkhon Island. She spent most of her time there with the shamans who were protecting it. Still, after the lake was officially protected by the government and heavily restricted for visitors and "investors", the shaman's work became more apparent. Then, apparently, the world's energetic field has stabilised and synced up with the other "nodes", as she calls them. I was, of course, primarily interested in THE shaman that she fell in love with, but she's been avoiding explaining the status of their relationship. It's obvious they are in... one. I have accepted all her decisions all these years and I'll equally accept any new ones today.

Jenny is back! She's acting like everything's fine like Bhumi is not a total emotional wreck. I can't look at him like this anymore... I stopped myself many times when I was about to spit some facts his way. However, I've been trying so damn hard to "let others be wrong". It's easy to do so when the person in question is not someone you love and care about deeply.

OG returned, and he started planning another trip to Australia almost immediately. We were almost unanimous in stopping him and trying to remind him of his age and the flight length. The thing is, he's just recently discovered how many LUX he has accumulated. He didn't bother checking the "balance" in over thirty years! His logic is that he should spend it while he's still able and... well, alive. I can understand that, even though I think he's wrong. But shouldn't I let him be wrong and do whatever he decides? What about Carlo, who just said the other day that he wants to have another kid all of a sudden? We should let others be wrong, but shouldn't friends be there to present options, perspectives and solutions? Friends shouldn't just blindly support every single decision one makes. I'm still confused about this. It's a bloody catch-22!

...and the damn dam broke! So, some context first. I decided to write a long blog post, expecting it to go unnoticed, but shockingly, the subscribers were still there after all these years of my inactivity. About ten per cent of them, but still, that's like a devout following of about a thousand people. They shared it around, and it spread worldwide, under the radar. I focused on the upcoming three-quarters of a century anniversary. But some foreign journalists didn't appreciate what I wrote, so they started talking shit about us and Isataion, calling us failed lab rats. Thus, I decided to break down all the accomplishments that we have done that the old United Nations was failing year after year, bullshitting everyone yet virtue-signalling the whole damn time. Here's the simplified break-down:

- **No poverty** - No shit Sherlock! No rich people, thus no poor people;
- **No hunger** - No one over-eats, while everyone helps grow the food;
- **Good health** - Food is medicine, if it's natural, in variety and seasonal. Health data must be public for prevention;
- **Quality education** - Make teachers the top "caste" and let them have the time to rest, recharge and improve;
- **Gender equality** - Embrace feminism, reject patriarchy;
- **Clean water & sanitation** - Treat water like people, with respect;
- **Renewable energy** - 80% of it comes from Sun and Wind (cheap!);
- **Good jobs & economic growth** - No more bullshit jobs, farmers come first while economists and advertisers can go to hell;
- **Innovation & Infrastructure** - If you build it (properly and maintain it), they will come (and stay for a long time and help out);
- **Reduced inequalities** - We ALL get a say in who deserves what;
- **Sustainable cities & communities** - Circular economy FTW;
- **Responsible consumption** - No c(r)apitalism - no wastefulness;
- **Climate Action** - We improved our whole region and volunteered all across the globe to help others improve theirs;
- **Life below water** - Just leave it alone, don't kill it, easy;
- **Life on land** - Same... Only plants and fungi are to be eaten;
- **Peace and justice** - We have never had an army, it's too expensive, and we barely allowed the formation of the Special Task Force;
- **Partnerships for the goals** - Indigenous, immigrants, young, old, men, women... All in together now, we need everyone!

Finally, I added an open invitation to any journalist to come visit us.

## **Birthday #74**

And then, this morning, I got caught by one in the forested city park. Well, it was one of our journalists, but still, it counts! She was charming, and I must say that after checking out some of her work just now, she seems like she knows what she's doing. What she's working on this year is asking random people from the streets and farms the same set of questions that were voted by her, mostly international audience. She wasn't surprised when I told her that today next year, I'll be celebrating my three-quarters of a century by visiting all my important trees and remembering who they're connected to and how much they've grown. That's my kind of party.

I still enjoy work, even if it's just five hours a week, but I still want to contribute, be helpful, and be valuable – it's a sense of purpose. I'm planning to work more next year. The main reason is the fact that we have an ageing population here, and the "latecomers" usually aren't able to work after their sixties. So while I can, I will do some work, especially in essential trades like food production. Seeing the fruits of my labour, pun intended, is plenty enough of motivation to keep me going. And working with interesting and fun people is a most wonderful cherry on the top. Plus, most of that work has always been very playful.

The romanto-dramatic saga with Jenny isn't going to end any time soon. They had a fight (a shouty one) for the first time in front of others after she said she wanted to go on another trip to Indonesia. That doesn't sound like a big deal, but she said, "I'm homesick, and I want to go back home for a while". I instantly remembered how worried I was about Bhumi when he was there for so long, so I didn't try to calm him down or interfere. I understand her, because she never fully relaxed and integrated here. She can do it, but she doesn't want to. Perhaps she still wants to have kids? She left this May and said she'll stay until September, but she's still there. BB even stopped saying that famous line of his, "Everything's fine", and just said he doesn't want to talk about it at all. Oh, when will it end?

My other two favourite people (if I have to pick three at gunpoint!) Beardy and Bae have spent many months abroad. He's been mainly in European Russia this time, and she's around Kazakhstan. They've

both become kind of famous, especially Beardy, and his Russian nickname is “Earth translator”, given to him by his fellow naturalists and foragers. I didn’t mind him going away for many short trips. I think that suits us both just fine, but his long trips are still tricky for me... I’m trying so hard not to get attached, but it seems that, again, I’m becoming increasingly needy.

OG has got a new nickname from me; I started calling him The Elder. I realized that because of one story we had with the local kids - he does fit that description perfectly – old, wise, tough, hard-working, ethical and acting as a glue that holds our community together. Oh dear, I almost forgot about Carlo. He’s doing fine, except he still wants to have another kid and is considering adopting one teenager from a remote community. Maybe he should become a teacher so he could cheat code his parenting desire. It kinda worked for me... Or did it?

The two of us were a part of an exciting project this autumn – turning empty apartments into mini vertical farms! Earlier this year, many people had to move to make room for the east and west-facing flats conversions. They’re all different due to sunlight availability, but we’ll see how they perform next year. There’s a full-circuit aquaponics, and the fish is rescued from China from a recent sea-food ban over there. We have over twenty thousand vacant apartments, and this vacancy will keep increasing.

What is also increasing globally is – the quality of all products! Machines, clothing, furniture, etc., are all designed to be long-lasting, easily repairable, with recyclability in mind. Most Western countries have been on top of this for the last decade, but now others have caught up, while some even improved on it, India being the perfect and surprising example of a circular economy.

I was pleasantly surprised a few weeks ago when the UK government decided to return all the priceless artefacts, works of art and historical treasures from the recently uncovered “Secret Royal Stash”, as they call it. Fortunately, they were all in immaculate condition, as I guess the Royal family was too clingy to sell them off in black market auctions. Seeing all the royal palaces used publicly for the past years brings hope for the full restoration of justice that the Commonwealth colonialism stole from half of the world. Their wealth was never the wealth of the commons, wasn’t it?

## **Birthday #75**

Let's start this year without drama, or at least save it until the end of the entry. This week I just heard the news about the completion of the uncrewed "Deep Sea" station in the Mariana Trench! We can finally start finding something other than just microbial life down there. I've always been more fascinated by these dark corners of the Earth than the ones outside of it. Now that we know more, we can realise how little we know overall.

Since China stabilised internally over the past few years, they have started helping out their neighbours, and the first ones are the Koreans. A massive joint effort is put forward to the ex-North Koreans, who have been struggling with integration in the peninsula and across Asia. Since China won its long-lasting war on depression and suicides, they are helping the Koreans acclimate to the globalist lifestyle that still has its pros and cons.

I know I said last year that I would work some more in this one, but... I changed my mind! It's my life, okay? I won't let a diary judge me! I got inspired by Leo telling his "evening stories" that we all know and love so much. Sometimes it starts with an innocent question about one of his (now very crumpled) tattoos, and an hour later, the topic may change. I wanted to experience life more while I still could. OG's so tough and strong, especially for a 99-year-old, but he is slowing down every year and is not fit to travel far away by himself. I'd love to travel with Misha, but he's always on a crucial conservation project somewhere else.

Thus, I went to the Kara Kum desert, where I met up with Beatrice, who has been practising her newly acquired energetical skills. I'm not sure what to call them. When I jokingly called her and her friends there - witches - no one reacted at all. I was expecting either a laugh or someone being triggered. We travelled all the way to the Hindu Kush and back. I loved Turkmenistan, especially the wonderful and welcoming locals that we met along the way. The witch crew was fabulous, but one shouldn't spend much time around them. I think I could easily get sucked in and become one myself!

Perhaps I've been pushing back on any adventure like this that will bring me closer to a more profound change that I feel I need. I've been

knocking away at the inside of my shell all my life, but sometimes a bigger hammer is needed. Looking at how much Bea has changed for the better in all aspects is so empowering. She's just been braver than I ever was. And less lazy.

She and Carlo came back on a sailing ship across the Caspian Sea, which was an adventure in itself. Two of them really do seem to work perfectly together, but unlike Beardy and me, they seem to team up well only for travels. It's so apparent when we're all back home how unlike they are. Likewise, I asked them many times about something happening romantically between them, and they both did a crappy job dissuading me of thoughts like that. Whatever happened, I'm glad it did because they've become good friends. I just wish it happened sooner.

Okay, now it's drama time! After fifteen years of ups and downs, Bhumi and Jenny finally broke up for good. I was hoping for this to happen earlier, but I just wish that it happened differently, not like this – by her telling him she's pregnant, but the baby ain't his! Jeez! She obviously had an affair on her last trip there, but the guy broke up with her as soon as she told him about the baby. She even tried to ask Bhumi for a second chance, which was brave but ridiculous. Even BB wouldn't do such a thing. He is now, of course, a complete wreck - barely functioning. Later he found out that the guy was her high-school sweetheart, even though Jenny had told Bhumi he was her first boyfriend. Maybe that's why she often seemed distant, cold and awkward. Lies burn a hole through your heart first and then out through all your layers and masks.

No matter what we do, after age ten, kids have mostly formed most aspects of their character anyway. If I was his biological mom, perhaps I could've given him a better chance in life. Or maybe I'd mess everything up even more. Parenting is, without a doubt, the most serious "job" we can do in our lives, and this is why we've always been so strict with first-time parents here in getting their licences. I know my parents made some mistakes, but as soon as I got to age 19, I became fully responsible for myself, in my whole entirety, with no excuses. For example, I really want to be like Misha and not expect anything from my partner. I feel it's so unfair to him, and it also pains me. Maybe we should also have relationship licences?

## Birthday #76

Just before the new year began, I applied for a council position just in time for the application deadline. I was hoping to get another chance, even though I knew they were crazy small. However... I didn't get in. Sorry for the false suspense. The great thing about this is that I changed my mind and decided to go on a train trip across Europe. This decision happened as Misha and I were chillaxing at a mud spa near the Black Sea at the mouth of the Danube. He was thinking of going to Finland, while I wanted... not that. So, we agreed to split up from there and meet back home a month or two later.

I decided to take the night trains only so that I could spend days exploring the cities I would visit. After visiting all the famous cities I didn't get a chance to visit, I ended up in Valencia. I realized I didn't want to revisit cities on the way back, so I had a great idea to take shared cars. It was less comfortable that way, but I enjoyed it. The random towns across Europe have more variety and are equally beautiful, while the townsfolk are warmer and more easy-going. Trains were comfier, yes, faster and more sustainable than cars (or buses even), but in cars, people are somehow more talkative. It's a tighter space, mostly. Many a time, I wished Beardy was there to share it with him, as I got many flashbacks from our bike trip ten or so years ago. It's so hard not to miss that guy!

Around the planet, a wave of small countries dropped their armies altogether, with only the "big players" still having a small military budget. Very few exclaves and enclaves are left in the world as well. Here at home, our government has publicly admitted its citizens being very active abroad, either with activism, volunteering or hacking. This raised some eyebrows, but no one complained yet. It worked, so breaking the law is allowed in that case, I guess.

Bhumi has finally understood my words about the first loves "They are the most powerful but can be poisonous too". Working in the same job all your life is as wasteful as spending all your life with the first person you fall in love with. That's what I think, at least, and I'm sure traditionalists have a problem with that, but whatever, this is my diary! BB is so brave in everything he does, but when it gets to Jenny, he becomes dependent and insecure while breaking his principles. He

feels less horrible and lonely now, a year later, and he said he was joking about becoming asexual or a hermit monk. He livened up a bit this summer when he got a big challenge at work, becoming a city guide for tourists. He even started training as a waiter last month! I could've never imagined him in these very sociable jobs, but apparently, he's been doing just fine.

Misha travelled some more after Finland, into the other Nordic countries, but eventually, he came back in November to spend the whole winter at... home! With... me! And he seems super happy about that, which somehow surprised me. I guess I'm projecting my insecurities and doubts onto him, who obviously cares for me and loves me deeply. This time I have with him now has a "Sunday vibe"; it's a beautiful and essential day off, yet you can't fully, deeply enjoy it because you know that Monday is just around the corner. I must say that I don't know where this analogy went because most of my life, I worked on weekends anyway.

Aside from the monthly video calls, Bae was left unseen this year, as she has been all over Pakistan for the whole year. Whenever we talk, she seems happy and excited but, sadly, doesn't seem to miss me or anyone. She's not showing it and not saying it, either. Still, I think that's alright; she doesn't have to miss us, right? But it sure does feel nice to be missed by someone...

Carlo finally fostered a teenage kid for an undisclosed length of time. He's obviously over the moon about it all, and the kid, Prasad, is okay with it all, or should I say - meh about it. Carlo gets emotionally hurt when Prasad calls him uncle. He'd love to be called a dad, but I think he should be happy he's not called a grandpa.

Speaking of a grandpa, one has just reached a century! Yes, Leo, the Original Gangsta Grandpa, aka The Elder, has been around since the Sex Pistols' release of "God Save the Queen" on BBC. Of course, we threw him a surprise party that he objected to initially but ended up loving it to... well, I'll not say death. Actually, he looks very deathly, at the moment. He signed up for a hibernation experiment, which I think is too risky for anyone his age, but he passed all the requirements and is fully conscious of the risks. Hopefully, he should be "waking up" in a couple of months, feeling even better. At least he, like most people, didn't sign up for the nanotech treatment.

## **Birthday #77**

Leo is doing great! He's back in another hibernation this winter. He only had one problem after his first week of waking up; he got dizzy and fell. But luckily, he didn't break anything, just ending up with some minor cuts and bruises. The team of doctors following his findings are finding that he's more than acceptable! Like with the other age groups, there are many benefits, but it seems they might be even more significant for the "very elderly", where he is categorised. Now we need to throw him a wake-up party every year as well.

Bhumi's not looking so great. Or perhaps this is his new self? He managed to get his heart broken already, so soon... Honestly, I think he hadn't healed from Jenny, yet he chose to fall madly in love again with a fellow waitress at work. All this drama lasted just over a month, and after the dust and tears have settled, I'll give the gist of it here. A new girl arrives. She's beautiful. She befriends BB. She tells him how she also got her heart broken last year. He falls in love head over heels. She likes the attention, so she decides to give it a try. Bhumi bombards her with love. She then gets scared and changes her mind. He makes pathetic drama. This seals the break-up and ruins their friendship. They stop talking altogether. Bhumi relocates to another restaurant. Heart in pieces. End of story.

Oh yes, during the two weeks of their relationship, he made her perger, but luckily, she realised it very quickly and got the abortion pill immediately. All this reminds me of my shenanigans when I was twenty years old. But Bhumi's over forty! That's the main problem here. He's been away from love for too long for many reasons, and when the time came to fall in love, he couldn't pick the right person, or know when to say no, or yes, or behave like a good boyfriend. I feel for him, and I understand, as I had lots of small relationships like that, some even with drama, but I never gave them too much of my energy. I think I haven't even mentioned them here, either. We all need to learn these things; you can't use a second-hand experience. It has to be yours, and it has to hurt sometimes.

I'm almost eighty, yet I still can't handle myself properly with Misha. I still have jealous thoughts and second guesses whisked in with some good ol' paranoia. Of course, I know it's all ego bullshit, but why,

after all these years, do these thoughts still come? Are they ever going to stop? Is it possible to prevent them from happening at all? I tried being as active as him and travel around, but I'm not like that. I enjoy being sedentary, and I can tell how big the difference is between loneliness and solitude. But whenever there's something urgent, Misha is there for me. I never did it still, but if I needed him near, I'm sure he'd come back instantly because when he's around, he engulfs me with his warmest, kindest love. That's how I know that I'm the problem here. Or am I?

I have started exercising and cooking with a community newcomer called Asha, from India. She's the most mysterious and sometimes most confusing woman I have ever met. But to me, that only makes her endlessly fascinating to be around. She was a fitness coach and a chef, so aside from my muscles, we've been working on my cooking skills. The things I thought I'd never be able to make because I'm a "clumsy idiot" I made (almost) with ease at 77 years of age. Beatrice's birthday cake was unreal in its appearance and taste. She still asks me occasionally whether I made that all by myself, haha! She has, by the way, been around for most of this year, thankfully. Asha does know how to strike me down when she told me recently how I like to hold monologues. I've always been into dialogues, except for the intense teaching years when I did catch myself blabbing on for too long, but I didn't notice it now. Maybe she just knows me for too short of a time.

One big global news was that all the South American countries had officially dissolved their armies and recycled their military equipment. The news could've been all the Latin-American countries. However, Mexico still has a standing army, allegedly because of the fear of the proximity of the US, which still has a full-time, professional military. It's like the cold war never ended. Just... drop the guns already, ya'll!

There have been no significant improvements in Isataion, but there was another tragedy. A woman got killed while trying to stop a teenage boy from being beaten up by a couple of bullies. They pushed her, and she fell down the stairs and broke her neck. The public's reaction to this was not at all as vocal as I thought it would be. I think I was the loudest one, doing a few vlogs on it. Since these things don't happen often, that doesn't mean we should become desensitised.

## **Birthday #78**

I tried applying for the council again just before the new year but to no avail. I feel like our government is stagnating, slowing down and becoming afraid of upsetting someone. I know I'm not the only one who notices this; year after year, many people on the Kvorum are even more outspoken about this.

Thankfully, one of them - an architect, got selected! She replaced a similarly-aged designer lady who got voted in four years in a row. That's outrageous, and we shouldn't allow things like that to happen. So far this year, the architect lady has been doing great in the discussions I have followed, even though she was rather brass at times. But things need to be said as they are, openly!

Obviously, I was very active on the Kvorum this year and helped out some young journalists with editorials. I must say that I have always secretly dreamt of becoming an "Editor in Chief", so even a small and not-so-popular team I got, I'm happy with. At least they are the ones who bravely speak out about the issues that exist here. I spent much more time in the city, but I managed to enjoy it. Some trees are now taller than some buildings. The Pine Pagoda tower still sticks out like a sore thumb, but I guess that was the only way to make a high-density city centre into a building.

The expected happened - nationwide youth protests in the US after more whistle-blowers came out with the military contracts between the companies and their government. Even though they spend a fragment of their budget at the beginning of this century, it's still a lot more than people think or even know. Once the data became public, people flocked to the streets. After a fiery month of that, voting was held, and it turned out that over sixty per cent of citizens didn't want their tax money to be spent on equipment that would never get used. Russia has the same problem, but the current government of theirs said that once the US disarms, Russia will follow immediately. Let's see what happens next year.

I forgot to write about people... Maybe that's the journalist inside, re-awakening, but with a vengeance? Anyway, my 44-year-old son has finally stopped being pathetic, and that's the first step to adulthood, I guess. It doesn't matter your skills, expertise or experience; if you're

afraid of women, men and children, you're doing it all wrong. He started practising TaiChi with one of the young Burmese ladies, and he seems... normal around her. I just hope he doesn't have a secret crush on the first woman that gives him a genuine compliment.

My Bae has hurt her foot and had to do some minor surgery; she got me so worried, especially because she told me it doesn't hurt her. I accidentally learned from one of the nurses that she was in horrible pain, even when not moving. Bea might think that's called bravery, but I think it's selfishness and recklessness all wrapped into a masculine complex. She's fine now, going for long walks with me without issues. I have to admit that she is strong, not just physically but mentally. She's always been like that. I'd even dare say she's the most clear-minded and focused person I know. Beardy would be on top of the list if he'd be more daring than her.

Speaking of him, he's been here and there, as usual, but I realised for the first time how consistent he is with everything he does and says. He can take that trophy over Beatrice (easily) or anyone else I've ever met. Funny how Carlo was the one who told me this and how it was as clear as day to him, but I completely looked past it. That's why one should have close friends nearby and not keep secrets from them. I've always had this connection with Carlo, even though I spend much less time with him than with Beatrice. I like spending time with Prasad, and he likes me more than Carlo's partner. He even jokingly said he wouldn't mind calling me mom, but not her and he calls her by her full name that no one uses – Magdalena.

I'll end up this entry with some wisdom from Leo. We had a lovely talk about love. What is love? He's been through ups and downs over the years and has assured me there's nothing to worry about Misha. Jealousy mostly comes from our insecurities and possessiveness. Letting him go means letting myself be free as well. I've since been trying to stop calling him MY Misha, or anyone else for that matter. It's so hard! That's such a deeply ingrained habit of HAVING someone. We don't have anyone except ourselves. "To have and not to hold, to love but not to keep." Thus, good ol' Madonna has got my go-to mantra this year. Yes, yes, I still do listen to late 90s pop music. Please don't tell Bea! If she finds this diary after I die, she'll hunt me down in paradise. Or hell... depending what I deserve, I guess.

## Birthday #79

US's army budget has been cut by HALF this year! The promise is that it will be cut in half each year, as the equipment manufacturers can decommission and recycle all the deadly machinery they've produced. It took them damn ten whole years to follow up on what the EU and China did. Russia's equivalent move is expected next year. The resources, money and workforce will now be redirected towards so many neglected but useful projects.

As Isataion fell back to a population of 300k, a third "city" is under construction in Brazil. Basically, it's just an extensive village, similar to our Periphery, but with communal houses being bigger, four floors up and two below the ground level. Everything is even more decentralised there, with no actual government, just the updated constitution we use. It is located in a massive protected area under reforestation, and the plan is that in forty years, fifty thousand or so inhabitants there will be able to live harmoniously in the restored rainforest. After our steppe here and the Libyan desert ecosystem, this has been a long-awaited next logical step and a crucial experiment.

Seeing how quickly this is sprouting up and how eager the local (mostly indigenous) people are, made me think a lot recently... What the hell were we waiting for so long? The technology they're using there is very basic, cheap, and there was no excuse for this being done... let's say, in 2005. The little tech there is would be steadily updated over the years, and with the micro-factories established for complete independence, it's a no-brainer. Just backwards politicians, bankers, and marketing fools hold the progress and evolution of humanity. Not to mention the carbon-negative way of living, with almost non-existent physical and mental health issues among the population. There's plenty of space for everyone! It's easy to say that it can't be done, it's too expensive, risky, strange or whatever other bullshit reply people habitually spit out first.

I truly admire and respect my parents for what they've managed to accomplish in their lifetime, but honestly... They could've done much more! Their generation kept blaming the boomers for everything, trying to play by the rules of the same system. All the evidence was

there, publicly available, yet ignored or even mocked. There was so much greenwashing and virtue signalling back then; I even remember seeing it as a kid. I remember how easily people satisfied their guilty consciousness, yet how much they neglected the guilt in the unconsciousness. They had become overly content with the small changes they were making, but now looking back... They could've easily made a much more significant impact with more effort and wiser moves. Tens of millions of lives could've been saved, and hundreds of millions more lives improved to a decent living standard, which in turn would've given their children a much better chance at life - with cleaner water, better quality food, steady electricity and access to information, just to name a few basic needs. Imagine how many talented kids were never able to shine their light from within and help make the world a better place – MILLIONS! I don't even need to mention all the non-human animals that got wiped out because of our non-action. We don't even know what we lost. Still, every day, dozens and dozens of new plant and animal species are discovered.

Oh boy, the dams are getting weaker as the years go by... With time, this diary might become my rant collection.

Misha has been abroad for the whole summer, working in a reindeer sanctuary, trying to re-establish their population in the wild infinite expanses of Siberia. His team has been doing some incredible work, which was mostly available for live streaming, so it helped me with loneliness. I'm so proud of him, working much harder in his 60s than most young people do in their prime age today.

Bea was here and there again, but at least I stole some cuddles from her instead. She said she needed them too. I've been pushing her to write her biography, a simple novel, but she's so stubborn. I could help so much! She doesn't even let me peek in her diary, yet she enjoys reading this one occasionally – unfair!

BB has been doing so great with QiGong, so much so that his teacher ushered him into TaiChi, and he's been at it for two months. I enjoy so much watching him flow through all the forms, incredible.

One evening, I caught Carlo and Leo sobbing their eyes out. Since Carlo has become such a role model to all the kids in the village, Leo feels like he's his father and that his job here is done. He wants to rest in peace so he can start another life somewhere. Whoah!

## **Birthday #80**

Where to begin... Well, I'm self-employed now, working on myself by being outside of myself.

The next day, after my last birthday, I started getting headaches. I don't remember when I had a headache before. They felt very strange and were increasing in intensity - a dull pain, like a massive weight pressing down on the left side of my skull. No matter what I tried, whatever I did to it, it just kept going. The doctors and scanners found nothing except my psychotherapist, who said I should write down my dreams and that I might be overthinking. I laughed at this, and afterwards, when I told Misha, he, to my shocked face, confirmed it. "Of course you do, dear. Does a bear shit in the woods?"

After talking to Beatrice, Carlo, Leo and Bhumi about this, they all agreed with the doctors, and these people know me the best. After I realised I had a triggered reaction that was there for a reason, of course, I decided that I needed to work on this through yoga and meditation. This is how it all started last winter.

I used to meditate randomly, usually for less than 30 minutes in a sitting, and do yoga (not regularly either) while worrying about many things and my body too. This started changing in my early twenties. Until then, I was doing a much better job, even though I was pumped with much more energy than nowadays.

Thus, this February, one young yoga teacher, who reminded me so much of myself from that exact period, started doing yoga with me privately every morning. She doesn't live far from our community and likes going early for walks with the local dogs anyway. I realised what I was missing so much - self-tenderness. I haven't been gentle and kind to myself most of my life. Outrageous expectations coupled with an identification with the nagging critic in my head are a recipe... well, for this state I have been in. I was doing fine in my life, but I plateaued, thinking that this was it, that's as far as I need to go. But one can always go deeper.

I was too busy with other people's lives because I neglected my own. I was lying to myself every day, subconsciously. No one else really needs me, depends on me; they're all adults. OG has plenty of people to step in and give a helping hand, for example. I am wholly

able and deserving to focus on myself and put myself in the first place, and the rest of the world will just have to go on somehow without me. This doesn't mean that I won't be seeing people and doing the things that friends do, but I will spend more time by myself than usual and listen much more than speak. So far, these ten months, I've been doing good.

If I indeed want to reach deeply into myself and find... whatever is to be found there, demons, angels, God... I need to spend more time in meditation practice and carry that mindset outside of it. Misha joins me often as a nice reminder to bring me back to the present, this moment, this only reality there is – the right now. I still drift away into the future, worrying about something, planning things, organising stuff, and I get stuck in the past, in the memories that are fixed in time and done with. All those moments are lost (“like tears in rain”) as time keeps on going, with or without me onboard. The point is to just be. Feel alive. Observe. Witness it all. The goal is to reduce desires, wants, hopes, wishes, prayers and mantras to the bare minimum.

So far, I'm feeling good about myself, what I have accomplished this year. I have realised how incredibly blessed I am to have all these wonderful people around me who understand and support me. Even Leo joins in sometimes, with meditation, not with yoga. He's not that fit anymore. He did warn me to be careful and not to take all this so seriously as I was taking everything before. He says that life is just to be enjoyed consciously. That sounds quite a lot like him, being a hedonist. Not the selfish one, but the simple one. Look how far it has got him... I wish that I could grow old like that! We'll see how far I can get; it might not be all in my hands.

There, I just started drifting into the previous thinking patterns! It is so easy to slip into that; the ego is on a constant alert, always ready to jump in. At the moment, I'm still learning not to have a negative attitude towards it, the thoughts, the reactions. It's just an evolutionary program that got too powerful for its own good, well, for our good. In an easy-going world that we live in today, there is no need to constantly protect us anymore. Death does not lurk behind every corner - that's what I always reply to the ego. Well, it's not really *I*, as in a part of my ego; it's the part that has always been there, calm and content. What the *I* wants to say is – just choose love.

## Birthday #81

This year I didn't write my random daily diary but instead started writing my dream diary (almost) every morning as soon as I broke free from the gravitational pull of the dreamland. That doesn't mean I won't do an entry here since it's just once a year and usually takes me less than an hour. I'll say that some dreams are a foreshadowing while others reflect deep subconscious desires...

Even though Misha advised against it, I've been back to vlogging again but doing short, one-take videos with pre-written scripts. I realised that it suits me just fine, and there are people who follow me and agree with the things I'm talking about, but there's a surprising number of people who don't. So? There are many delusional people in the world, and Isataion still has a few. Just the other day, I met a young girl talking to her friend on the phone about how those wildlings from the Periphery are crude. Of course, I had to jump in and defend the absent - that's one of my duties and new-year resolutions! How can people bite the hand that feeds them when they have no clue where the food on their plate came from?

Secretly, I've been very active on the Kvorum, especially on this topic. There's a significant move for doubling the communal hour, to two, for many reasons. The two most significant would be the one I just mentioned - there are still people who look down on farming and, in general, don't appreciate the food they're ingesting every single day. The second would be physical well-being and, more importantly, mental health. Our bodies and minds have evolved to be physical and do stuff every day, but outdoors. Boxes with four square walls don't exist in nature. I've only spent time in my house in winter, but I still push myself to do a short walk every day. Living in nature, not close to nature, is the only way to live!

I keep going back to Misha as an example. Let's ignore the fact how loving and caring he is, even though he didn't have many relationships or experience. Let's also breeze over the fact he paused all his plans to help me out on this inward journey of mine. To see him with cold, objective eyes - he is just the perfect citizen. There are many people like him here in the Periphery, but not so many in the city. It's hard to appreciate nature fully when you're removed from it.

Regardless of how green and eco-friendly your town is, living in high-density places is unnatural. Whenever Beardy goes for his project trips, all the photos he sends are not filled with hundreds of people, but small groups, which are repairing the damage that will eventually benefit the many. Altruistic decision-making is vital, and he is one of the most selfless people I know. Yet, he's rarely tired, mentally exhausted, needy or naggy. So go figure, if you want to be successful, perhaps you should help others become successful.

Bea wasn't here most of the year again! I miss that wretched witch! She's been back to Baikal, getting trained by the local shamans again, but I know there is another reason why she likes to go back there, to Olkhon specifically. At least I know his name now, as it slipped from her, he's Sayn, and it seems he's much younger than her. That's all I managed to gather in all these years...

Carlo spends too much time with kids, everyone's kids. He's like a permanent, real Santa with his new, extended beard. I think he is catching up on his missed childhood through them, but when I told him this, he just laughed at me. He thought I was joking. He's obviously out of touch with subliminal shadows from his past.

I realised why Bhumi is so weak around women. It's because he's been pushing his masculinity in every aspect of his personality otherwise. Perhaps it started when he lost his parents, and the specific way it happened and left him powerless. I'm not sure about that still. The most critical time when a man needs to be a man is with a woman, and that is precisely where he fails.

Leo decided to opt out of the hibernation regime suddenly. Everything was going so smoothly for other participants as well. He says he already feels much better anyway and doesn't want to waste so much time. Even though most of us believe he will live to the second century, he says he's running out of time, pfft!

Russian and Kazakhstan governments are trying to take credit for our success here, even though private investors were where most of the support and funding came from. They put so much pressure on us back in the '30s, yet they now claim they can't admit or apologise for something a different government did. That's how it took Japan almost a hundred years to admit their crimes against China and other Asian peoples during WWII. No justice, no peace!

## Birthday #82

It's so hard letting others be wrong!! At times I think it's not something one is supposed to do because what if everyone just let people do whatever they thought was right, especially when they're hurting someone else in the process or destroying nature? It goes against the Law of Least Effort since doing the right thing shouldn't be this hard. There shouldn't be so many obstacles on the way to it. If I know more about something than my friend, who is about to waste at least a month of her life on a mistake, isn't it my duty to share my knowledge? The time she wastes, she will never get back, and there is a chance that she might not learn the lesson from it by herself. Besides, it hurts me to see my friend suffer needlessly.

I've made so much progress over the last couple of years, uncovering many demons and facing them head-on until they are evicted. There are many that I didn't know I had, lurking deep in the shadows all these years, pulling the strings that bound me to lower levels of existence. I discovered that many of these problems were caused by my parents' mistakes, and of course, I have to forgive them for that because they were making wrong decisions because of their own parents and upbringing.

The environment one grows up plays a role too, but not as big as a family does. Family can really fuck one up. Now I don't have any second guesses about myself not having a child. Once I was able to "let go" of Bhumi, I felt... free. For goodness sakes, he's almost fifty! His problem happened to him even before we met, so that's not my responsibility. I tried so hard before, but he's been an adult for many a year now. So, I just let him be wrong and try not to watch him making a fool out of himself around women.

Once I get myself straightened up, I'll be able to fully commit to others if and only IF they ask me for help. Even for my opinion, if I'm not asked about, I shall not give it! I must admit that has been so hard. Luckily, vlogs help out a lot, as there I have the freedom to speak to people in general, and whoever finds it helpful, great, and if someone doesn't agree with me... well, it's their loss.

Sometimes it seems to me that God is testing me. All these weird situations and people being thrown at me at random, trying to trigger

me into a violent reaction. But I'm smarter than that! Most of the time, I stay calm and collected, defend myself and stand up for the absent, who obviously can't defend themselves. Not so long ago, a younger man approached me while we were working on one of the swales, telling me I was doing my part wrong. I knew that he just recently completed his training and lacked practical experience. He seemed very upset and aggressive in his approach, yet I told him nicely to mind his part and that I knew what I was doing. That infuriated him, and when he started shouting a bunch of random information, efficiency data and a whole load of gibberish at me, I just stopped him and told him that he could be wrong and that he needed to accept that. Just because he's a young, modern man and I'm an older woman doesn't make him infallible and me obsolete. At that moment, he was taken away by one of the ladies from the farm, and he never spoke to me again.

These events strengthen my resolution to my path, which I have taken so daringly against many odds. I'm sure many outsiders have an amazingly positive impression when they visit us and see how things work here and how people are. But that's just a first impression, and it's just too superficial. Visiting any place is like scratching the surface of the fossil find with a brush, for a few minutes, compared to going at it with picks, shovels and power tools for a month. Whenever I travelled somewhere, I felt that. That is why I still have the desire to move somewhere, for a year at least, so I can see how the locals live, try to learn the language, cook how they cook and walk some miles in their shoes. Trying to experience the world through tourism, even if it's the fairest eco-social-kind, is like meeting someone interesting at a party and thinking you know them. I should move to India while I'm still able.

No matter what's happening in the world, the region and even the city, I need to focus on myself now. I have deserved it after caring for others all my life, trying to be super productive and enduringly helpful and gifting my energy and time to people and projects that sometimes were oblivious and unaffected by my presence and contribution. This fighting mindset came to be in the 20th century when white male capitalists needed to push people to work harder. They saw the mechanization reducing the work hours and got shit-scared.

## **Birthday #83**

I've had a few moments during my meditations and walks that I don't know how to explain exactly, but I'll try. One, for example, seems to have been about me not asking anything from the universe, Dao, God, angels, life or whatever one might call it. This happened after my thoughts stopped coming, and I got "taken" to a very bright place that seemed endless yet warm and cosy simultaneously. It seemed so far away from me and the forest bench I was sitting on. Simultaneously, it felt like I went deep inside of myself, somewhere. Anyway, after being there for a while, a short while, a long while, I've no clue, a voice said, "So? Go ahead, ask something." I, in fact, had nothing to ask. Nothing at all, somehow. I started feeling confused and then came back around to... well, I guess this physical dimension.

After similar kinds of "encounters," I feel like I should change something or do something differently, but I just can't find what that is. I have been asking for opportunities to show themselves, but now I think they'll happen anyway. I must be present when they come and choose consciously based on the correct principles. So far, it's been so good, at least on my end.

Early this summer, an old journalist friend contacted me and asked me whether I'd like to help her daughter out with her documentary; she's also a journalist. The theme is Isataion and the life here, but most importantly, the lives of its citizens – people's stories. Well, that was an easy choice, of course, I said yes! However, after Tara, my friend's daughter, arrived with her small team, I realized I would not be one of the interviewees. I was sure that's how I understood her mom. After persuading Tara, I got a spot instead of another elderly lady they had already contacted.

I felt so electrified and excited, but not nervous at all. I talked about how it was to grow up here, my travels and life in general. I did my part very well, and it did feel nice and tempting, to be important and potentially influential. If the documentary becomes popular, it might have a massive effect on the audience. This movie will inspire more people to change, be better, and DO better! I didn't do it for fame, vanity and selfishness; of course, that's a given.

I felt that destiny, fate, my soul contract or whatever you want to name it, must've had this in mind for me, waiting all this time for me to clear out some things and improve, so I could now come back to the world, shining more brightly than ever before. I remember, let's call them angels, told me once that I need to purify my light for it to be seen. There are too many dimming obstructions in the way. I know I must work harder on myself, dive deeper and become the best possible version of myself.

Yet, the movie wasn't so popular after all. Until today, it got only about 100k views in the last couple of months. How did this happen, and why? It's free, good quality and an hour long. Perhaps it should've been longer? Or maybe even shorter because of the dreaded attention span that people have today? Maybe the producers should split it into 360 10-second clips for the youth to get hooked on it... Then it should've been more dramatic, with special effects and memey editing. But honestly, I was very disappointed in how little screen time I got, and they just left in the parts where I talked about the Periphery. They also left in the part of my childhood and me mentioning my yearly diary. The oddest thing is I saw a couple of upvoted comments on people being inquisitive about you, my dear diary. So, I guess that you are the superstar this year, not me.

That was not the frustrating part, though. Talking to Tara was, and her mom. Of course, I complained and felt betrayed and tricked about all of this, but they didn't take me seriously at all. We had an argument about self-centredness, and THEY tried to teach ME about being selfless. Bitches, please! I gave so much to this community (and many others abroad) that the two of them wouldn't even accomplish in three lifetimes each. I did tell them that, and that's when the conversation ended. But I'm okay; I'm still waiting on them to call back and apologize for everything.

Journalism takes much more effort, precision, clear communication and very clear goals. Many a time, improvisational skills will come in handy when things don't go to plan and to think on one's feet, and multitasking are a necessity. I don't think that Tara and most younger journalists today have that. I think most young people today are much less capable than my generation. My generation had it way harder, yet we are the more capable ones.

## **Birthday #84**

My year started off with a question - If I didn't deserve what I prayed for and asked for, does that mean that I'm not ready for it yet, or that I'm asking for the wrong thing?

I got busy more with work; finally, I needed to use my old hands on something constructive aside from the usual food production. I went back to city maintenance. I keep having these short flashbacks for years, decades even, and quite often, I get some moments of the work I did with the team in the city streets. The moments are not just memories, visual, but with smell, texture, temperature... emotions too, for a split second. It's like a quick time travel jump. They happen at the least suspecting times when I brush my teeth, wash the dishes or check on the veggies in the garden. Perhaps these are more like time travel than memories?

In any case, I did this simple, light work with teams of the most various people one can find here. As it has always been, the "clean-up crew" is still the most representative sample of Isataion around, they're superb, and there's never a dull moment with them. There was a very harsh moment, though, when one girl told me off, as if I'm a senile old grandma, just being in the way of everyone. She didn't say that in rude or offensive words, but the way she told me how she's not interested in hearing my life stories and wisdom every day showed how she has no respect for the elderly, not just for myself. I tried not to take it too personally, but this really hurt for a while. No one ever called me a chatterbox in my whole life!

During that time, I decided to try and apply for the council position again, but after a rollercoaster of agonizing emotions and stormy oscillations between patience and anxiety, it just didn't pan out. I guess that time passed long ago; I just got beginner's luck. I shouldn't care about politics anymore, anyway! I'm still active on the Kvorum and do short vlogs about, well, whatever I think it's important. I did notice that there is less and less activity in the comments. But it's probably because most of the younger audience is switching to global, more trendy platforms.

I've gotten quite good with manifesting and using the divine energy for creation. I never get exactly what I asked for, but I usually get it in

another form with a different twist. It's just... it's the small, simple things that work out. I never got the big things that I asked for, hence my question from the beginning. This manifesting is extremely powerful once you tap into it, but I never seem to be entirely in control of the process. Some of the things I did just for myself, of course, but mostly it's for others, not only from around here but around the world too. For example, I once meditated for over two hours, and my thoughts got silent. Before my body would start fidgeting and getting numb, I simply asked for a trip with Misha somewhere. I didn't specify what or when, just with whom. So, this June, that was precisely what I got.

We took a trip to the Altay mountains, where he went before at least a dozen times, but the location was new to both of us this time. We joined a team of archaeologists and anthropologists on a new and quite significant discovery of another Denisovan site, a cave. This cave was filled with river sediments, and the preservation level was incredible. I should add that we got two opportunities; the other one was a site in Antarctica, but we're both too old for that. Even today, they are still finding new artefacts in that Altay cave. It felt so good to be a part of something that has the power to change our history or, in fact, what we know about our past and our ancestors.

There have been many discoveries in archaeology for decades since more funds were allocated to these earthly branches of science instead of the bottomless money pits of astronomy and quantum physics. I still love learning about that too, but there is so much more that we don't know about this planet, about flora and fauna on it, including ourselves and, of course, the vast assembly of seas – the ocean.

While in the camp, I bumped into some shamans and had a very long talk. They've told me that I'm not fully awakened yet and that the ego entities are blocking my enlightenment. At first, I was angry with them, but it got me thinking. Were these last few years of self-work just a waste of time, and I positively misled myself? What if this Divinity is not real but a figment of my imagination? Or it just doesn't care, especially about us oldies? What's the whole bloody point of wasting my life, then? Especially if death comes for me next week - what happens then? I shudder just thinking of this.

**Birthday #85**

I don't have to do anything.

I only have to die.

Thanks for that, entropy!

Happy birthday. Happy Birthday.  
What a rhapsody of fear.  
Let's strum the harp of pointlessness,  
I survived another year.  
Each little candle – a tiny death knell,  
A snickering footman, a tolling bell;  
One for deception and one for a crime,  
And one for a dream extinguished by time!  
Our life's a brief shuffle down the gangplank of pain,  
'till we're just an old sponge cake left out in the rain,  
Stumbling to oblivion from embryo to ghost;  
So let's charge our dirty glasses and raise a futile toast:  
"To you, and your meaningless milestone of decay."  
Happy birthday. Happy birthday.  
...like anybody cares.  
It's a lie, it's a lie, it's a lie, it's a lie!  
It's a cake in the shape of a lie!  
Why use that knife to cut the cake?  
Why, here's the reaper's scythe.  
Happy birthday, Cheeky Chops.  
It's not every day you're eighty-five.

(by B.B.)

## Birthday #86

Again, he saves me. Time after time, my Beardy jumps to the rescue. My God, what would I do without him, where would I be, would I even be here now? He has saved my life this year. He helped me function again; even writing this annual entry would be impossible if he hadn't stepped in. Positivity is back, flowing freely into me and my life, balancing out the festering darkness that had engulfed my whole being these last few years. Dear God, has it really been that long? Getting lost in your mind is like getting stuck in time, except it goes on without you, like the bus you just missed.

Misha came back from Georgia in late February, seeming strange, talking about his reoccurring dream and looking for something in a kind of frenzy. At least by his standards, to my eyes, he acted beyond strange. The next day he managed to find an old tattered kite that Shushu had left him long ago, and he quickly settled back to normal. Being so obviously self-absorbed and selfish, I didn't even bother asking him what he was planning to do with it. Yes, I have read the previous entries many times this year, including some random daily ones... so I'm aware of... what I have become.

The night afterwards, he finally decided to step in, gingerly and kindly at first, like he always does. It didn't take much "prodding" to trigger me into a fighting mode, even though he was just using his Socratic method like usual. After a very short while of that, I ended up shouting at him and threw a wine glass that broke on his head. The red wine spilt and made it look like I murdered him on the spot. I jumped up, realizing what an idiot I was, to see if he was okay. He did get a cut, but it wasn't bleeding a lot. I don't even remember what I was saying, but I do remember him being mute for a few minutes. That got me even more worried, and instantly I felt I had just lost him forever; I had betrayed him. He just stood up, tears in his eyes, gave me a big hug and said how he was sorry... HE was sorry?!

After I let him finish what he wanted to say, I found out that he had suspected for a long time that I was heading in the wrong direction with my "self-work", but he chose not to step in. He felt that I would find my way back onto my path and that he should let others be wrong. He said that was the most difficult choice he had ever made, and it

was... wrong. Of course, Misha blamed himself for this. He blames himself for everything. I lost my mind while trying to get out of my head. Being an adult is solely my responsibility, and I don't expect him to fix me. Yet, he made a choice this time not to react to my violence. Which ended up restoring the balance and making everything up. That's the power of self-control and stepping out of your default reactivity.

Since then, he spent all his time here, with me until he just left last month. But all that time, he was meditating with me every day, guiding me throughout the whole process every step of the way. I don't think any therapist would go that far with a patient/client. The first thing he did, was to mess up the house. Because it was too tidy! I didn't even notice how far I went with perfectionism, almost into OCD... Wabi-sabi philosophy returned to my daily life with a good kind of vengeance. During this intense time with him, I appreciated every moment and his unrelenting and selfless love. I don't know whether I had ever deserved having him in my life, even before I turned sour...

So what do I do now? Well, ideally, nothing, as I just need to learn to breathe and be. Again. Just be. No object or objective is required. Feel the energy in my body, feel my life rushing in and out through my lungs as time invariably keeps moving on. I just need to flow with it, pick a wave, any wave, and just ride it. I passed the momentum hurdle. Now it is just simple and easy maintenance. I actually know this well, as I did it before. But this time, I will respect my ego's opinions. I won't fight with it anymore. I will call the shots; my soul will always choose the same – love. I'll stay rooted in love. Fear loses its stranglehold. There are many fears that I have conquered, but there are a few more. If I live to be over a hundred, I'm sure I'll tackle them all, one at a time.

This time I focus on myself again, to participate in the world, be with others, and accept them as they come and go, just like ego's thoughts. The perceived differences are just that; they are just superficial. The ego doesn't know what it's talking about. It's just scared (and scarred) guesswork. Maybe that's right, maybe that's wrong. Maybe it doesn't matter at all. No more worries for me, thanks. The random will come, regardless. And you know what - birthdays are not such a bad idea, after all, I might get to truly enjoy them.

## **Birthday #87**

I've been sitting here for the past hour, trying to write, but my hands and arms just won't work... So much pain all over. I even forgot how I wanted to start this entry... Let's just say that the last year was the calm before this storm of a year.

Firstly, Leo, the most inspiring person in this place, has decided to leave us this May. He took a nap after one barbecue and didn't come back. There was a half-full pint next to him, and he had some "Carlo' Stellar Sauce" stains on his shirt. He was laughing and joking with us until the very last moment. That morning he said something that I hope will stick with me forever "The choice of your thoughts manifests their reality".

He was such a wonderful human being, and every year he lived here with us was our sheer blessing. I don't remember seeing anyone who didn't cry when they found out, and we buried him the following week. Everyone else's time here is bound to come, too, no matter who they think they are. Between birth and death, there's a lot of time for lots of things to be done. Many incredible moments, many tough choices, lots of mistakes, some fun times and some hard times likewise. Still, some times are just sorrowful.

It gets worse, though. My guardian, my angel... my saviour, has gone away too. This time for good. Just when I thought I couldn't cry any more, I did. Reading last year's entry hurts me so much... It makes this year, this moment now, seem unreal, like a bad dream, stuck in an alternative reality that I can't wake up from. If there are saints, I'm sure he joined them, honestly. Leo did some truly stupid shit when he was younger, but I think he made up for it in the end. Misha... I have never seen him do or even say anything mean to anyone, including plants and animals. Very early on in our relationship, he told me things I never believed. I thought he was just being dramatic. Things like seeing and feeling the strings that connect us all and other people's energy vibrations. Maybe he actually did? Was he done with his purpose, saving me last year, so now he's gone to another place to continue his "work"?

I remember Leo saying he needed Carlo to replace him here, so he could go. But what about me, then? What the hell is my purpose? I

don't see myself half as valuable as these wonderful souls. I don't remember ever saving anyone's life. Mom was the one who helped Bhumi, not me. I just let go of him these past years. Maybe I should focus on him now more and be there for him? I don't know! I don't know what I should do now...

It's been three hours that I've been trying to write this... I think I should mention how Bhumi, Carlo and Bea were so supportive, not just to myself but to each other, as everyone's so sad here. They're all wonderful souls too, and I really want to be worthy of them, of being their friend. What I started last year, all these goals and methods I wrote - I will continue, so I can be better, for my sake, for their sake and for everyone else I encounter. That's a promise I have given myself, and I will not break it. However, I still have doubts about the point of it all. Maybe because there's been so much pain this year, it's blurry. Sometime soon, I will see things more clearly. I just gotta remember to take smaller steps each day.

Okay... now I can write about what happened. Before Misha returned to the Caucasus with that big, strong kite, he was different, acting strange. I mean, that's one of the few times I have seen him rushing around in a hurry. I tried talking to him about the dreams that he mentioned, but he barely told me anything. Anyway, I got the impression that those mountains were the place where he truly belonged. I denied this fact for years until I let him go and return as he pleased. For the last few trips, he would always go to the Caucasus, not Ural, not Altay or Elbruz anymore.

I still have a hard time believing this story that his friends told me... One early morning, when they were flying their kites, a sudden gust of wind pushed the kite higher and lifted him off the ground, off the cliff. But he kept holding on somehow. After he entered the fog, that was it. They searched for him and the kite for a couple of days, but nothing was found. The huge drop would've killed him instantly. He wasn't suicidal, mad, drunk, high or anything like that. He didn't seem scared, either. Maybe he saw this coming, his death?

This reality is so harsh sometimes and horribly unfair. So many good people are taken away just like that... No explanation, no reasoning, no nothing. While the rest of us just moan and complain, talk about philosophy and ethics... and cope.

## Birthday #88

Oh man, this has most definitely been a very sad and lonely year... However, after all is said and done, that's fine. It's fine not to feel fine all the damn time. It's fine to cry sometimes, and often even. As long as I get up afterwards feeling lighter and clean up my mess, I'm happy. I'm also just happy to be able to clean my mess. Some oldies of my age aren't able to do those things... I've been working with them before, praying to all the Gods just not to end up like that. So far, my prayers have been fulfilled. I have been slowing down with everything I do, but that's fine too.

I restarted writing my RDD - random daily diary - while throwing out an occasional ranty, preachy vlog here and then. Better there than here. I also got busy with some work, becoming the oldest carpenter in my local workshop. I know that's all ego, but damn, I feel proud about that. Not too long ago, carpenters would have never reached these years, at least not with all ten digits still attached.

Wow... I just had to go back and read a few older chapters to see how I wrote before the "ego-madness", as I call it and to see what to write next; I got stuck after two passages, jeez. Many things feel like a struggle now, and I don't mean about my "grandma memory" or my creaky ol' bones, but this perpetual sadness, this heavy burden... It really hurts and debilitates me sometimes. I'm struggling now even to do things I loved before that were good for me. Could this Resistance mean that I don't want to be better? Or maybe some things are still left unresolved, unchewed? That's what my therapist thinks, at least, more on her later.

First, about the three most lovely people I know. My Bhumi first, my dearest young man. He's been near the whole time, being so supportive, even quitting some of his appointments for me, even though I argued against him doing that. He's become a QiGong and TaiChi teacher and is already sought after around Isataion, being almost fully booked. He has finally fully "adulted" after facing his demons of the past, his own anima. He paid his dues and suffered but learnt from it all, growing strong and tall now. He's now, like I always have seen him, developing into his full potential. I still wish it had come sooner for him, but I guess this time was needed for him to

do it properly. He's happy and fulfilled, without any fears and what more could a mom ask of her son?

Beatrice and Carlo have become the dream team, at least when they're around me here. They're both doing well in their own respective lives, but also together, it seems like our "triangle of friendship" is finally complete. Until one of us does something stupid, and it turns into a Bermuda triangle of doom! Nah, we're too wise for that now, three old village sages (or farts!). I noticed they were taking turns being here in Isataion these past couple of years, so one would always be near me. I asked Bae this, and her reaction was enough of an answer for me, a confirmation. I'm happy they both still enjoy travelling and going on adventures, and I told them they should stop worrying about me; I'm fine. Carlo has definitely become the new OG on the block. Oh yes! I almost forgot - last month, I found some photos by chance and realized that Leo and Shushu had exactly the same eyes when you zoom in. I got sucked into that for at least an hour, thinking of the meaning behind it all. I still don't know what to really gather from that...

The city had some significant updates, which I guess I should cover like I used to do before. Our surplus of energy production is being used for remote crypto-currency transfers, which is an exciting side hustle for a government these days. Cars are barely used anymore, mostly legs, bicycles and sometimes buses. Solar panels have a major upgrade - they're photosensitive, so their transparency varies. I've been seeing those everywhere; on the balconies, windows, roofs, barriers, busses... etc.

My therapist girl is incredible! Allora is so young but intuitive and mature in her behaviour and attitudes. I love her so much that I begged her to give me regular long, warm hugs after each session. She said I made her break all the rules, but it's on me. As long as I don't emotionally vomit on others, we're both okay with being slightly unprofessional. She's so intelligent and is a wise, gentle, old soul. She helped me regain the reigns, as I trust her advice completely. Misha would be a good therapist, but he was a councillor to us all and a role model to look up to. Always on point, yet concise and straightforward.

Hope is a beggar, a wise, funny man once said. I know I need to reduce hope, as having hope is very different from having faith...

## **Birthday #89**

Writing my reports for a local news portal has saved me. Of course, I'm not counting the regular work at farms, which I still do more than an hour a week. My work gets heavily edited sometimes, but I gave up on reacting. Apparently, "it's ranty and too dark at times". My ego is so pissed, but honestly, I couldn't care less what my ego has to say after all that happened. Finding news and stories from around the world has been surprisingly enjoyable for a person who always claimed that a journalist must be there eye-to-eye in order to get to the primary source. Being useless is the worst punishment, so having something to do here and there is excellent while inching close to being ninety.

Finally, no more big, standing armies remain in the world's countries! Even the big players have thrown in the towel: China, Russia, the USA and the EU. India was the first big player to be brave and smart enough to redirect its budget to something more useful, and the USA was the last one. After many years of attempts, the Russian government eventually signed the crucial Native Lands Stewardship Act, which made Siberia and a few other European territories the largest autonomous native reserves and ecological preserves in the world. Misha would've rejoiced at this news and jumped for joy since he was calling this jokingly "Siberian Pagan Republic" and being an activist for this cause long before the government noticed. The Americas are next!

There is still a huge void in me, and that is Beardy. I try not to show the darkness to others, I think they have had enough, and now my pain is my own. Everyone's getting on with their lives, and they should, of course. Bhumi's teaching is going great – he did tell me he will finally achieve his purpose since many masters have been helping him with the celibacy... thing. I laughed at this, but not to his face. It is funny how, now that he is truly a complete person with no fears and plenty of confidence with women, he decides to become celibate. The irony of life never ceases to amaze me. Beatrice and Carlo are happy, travelling more this year, yet still being very useful and caring members of our society, breaking the taboo about old, helpless people that need constant care from the younger population.

I almost had to change the therapist this year, as my lovely one was super busy. Seems like that job has overtaken elderly care in popularity these days... We have plenty of them, but most countries still don't have enough access to mental health care. It's almost the 22nd century, and still, some fundamental problems are not resolved equally everywhere. Thank goodness for global internet access since it was officially recognised as a human right ten years ago; millions of lives have been saved. Still, nothing can beat being with a person in the same time-space, not just time.

I talked to Allora a lot about dreams as this year, at least once a week, Beardy appears in my dreams. And that day is the most challenging day of the week for sure. We are trying to analyse them, but I'm confused about what I need to do. Consciously I feel like I have to let him go, but subconsciously, I still haven't completely. I keep going to "our spots", where we used to do things together. The ones in the city look so different today, strikingly tall and gorgeous. Trees are such a beautiful testament of time, and rivers and streams are a daily reminder of it. Looking at our old photos and videos together and then seeing the places changed is almost as hard as seeing my reflection in the mirror. I remember thinking of myself, for most of my life, as just an average woman with average attributes and boring, average everything. Now I see how lucky I was to have (had) a bit of everything. I remember how many compliments he would give me, calling this part perfect and that shape just as it should be. When the average is accepted as perfect, the boring becomes irrelevant.

Wow, next year I'll be ninety... Almost nine decades, that is! Suddenly it sounds like a whole damn lot. But when I browse the folders of my memory, it seems I haven't lived enough while I was young. Yes, yes, I know, I don't really regret anything; I did what I could with what I've had. I'm just saying how one person can accomplish so much in one lifetime. But only if they take good care of themselves, physically and mentally, in the same amount. I think I could've done much better with the mental aspect of my being. I've always been reactive and handled everything personally. Now I don't care what people think of me, my looks, my behaviour, my writing... I tried pleasing everyone and made my choices based on their opinions. But in the end, I displeased myself.

## Birthday #90

Reporting is good, reporting is excellent, the report is important for me! I'll start first with the conversion of our LFTR into an efficient fusion reactor. Finally, the time has come! No protests this time. I remember how afraid people were of fission when the Fukushima disaster happened... And consequently, how hypocritical.

Looking back, it wasn't necessary because our problem was a lack of energy storage. We got plenty of power from PV and wind, even when we had half a million people here. Crazy to think that... Now it's half that, and I still can't stand spending too much time in the city. The reactor used waste from conventional fission reactors, so the harm was minimal. We exported so much of our energy to Kazakhstan, especially when they had blackouts for those mad years with intense heat waves. Beardy was always for fusion, and today, finally, it's not only 20 perpetual years away.

After the free-trade and travel-free status between India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan, ongoing talks have been about uniting them into Jambudstan, with the constituents being antonymous republics. After the Koreas, China, the Balkans, and many African countries, this seems like a natural progression, belated if I'm to be asked. Misha was always talking about these historical moments as a greater step forward in human evolution, more unification, but with greater decentralisation.

Seems like I can't go on without mentioning him at least once... I guess Beatrice was right. I should apologise because I told her to mind her own business. That reaction also surprised me then, but now, I can see why. I still get surprised by my shadow. Bae told me I can't stop thinking about him because I always talk about him. I claimed that I keep mentioning him because he's stuck in my thoughts, but I guess it could be the other way around. It's not that I don't want to mention him, but less would probably be better. I'll try it and see how it goes. And how long I can endure.

Allora and I have been back to my parents and childhood, talking about their decisions. She thinks that they did a great job, considering how many problems of theirs they had. I do remember both of them telling me how stressful was the parenting licence they had to study

for while she was fregnant with me. I know how helpful those guidelines and the consequential confidence were for young parents. Still, Allora at least agrees that if they were very stressed out during the pargnancy, that must have left some negative effect on me and my emotional development.

I know I shouldn't feel lonely here, even though Bhumi went to China for training. Carlo and Bea are nearby, and I made some new friends in this new community. Yes, I moved this summer because I felt I needed to change location, as too many things, and some people, reminded me of... him. But since I have moved, I still think about him the same. Most of the time, I have a smile on my face, but sometimes I get so sad, and tears just won't stop flowing down it. I gave up on stopping them anymore. I did notice the difference when I'm busy or idle. That's why I keep working a bit here and there, as much as my slow and sore body allows me to. Long winter days are the toughest, as those are the times when I miss his warm cuddles the most... Big pillows don't really help; they just soak up the tears.

It all feels like a tightrope I'm walking on, balancing precariously between acceptance of my current feelings and the acceptance of the vacuum of space that he has left. They are essentially in juxtaposition, and finding equilibrium is hard most of the time. Sometimes I feel good, having up to ten "green days" in a row, but then again, I get ten "red days" in a row. I know I should keep myself busy, and I'm trying my best, but my body can't take more than twenty hours a week of labour. Even for light-duty tasks I struggle with focus, and when the thoughts go astray, they usually end up at... him. I shouldn't mention his name anymore, or at least not as much. But immediately, I feel like an asshole for doing that... like just now.

I heard of a treatment people get abroad, removing their memories and fucking around with their brain with nano-tech injections, but I'm not that desperate. Life is actually okay now, objectively and logically speaking. But I can't ignore the sadness. I'm not a reasonable machine that goes through life, ticking one objective after another in a linear and binary way. I just don't want to go back into my old pattern of judgemental and condescending thoughts. My life has been a crazy rollercoaster of emotions, and obviously, I still haven't learnt to deal with loss and death. Yet?

## **Birthday #91**

I've been going back through this diary, and it's been a while since I travelled back in time like this... I don't look at old photos and videos often either, but reading my own thoughts and feelings from way back, like seventy years ago, is... quite valuable, I must say. But this has unexpectedly brought about a very intense and lasting gratefulness. I feel so thankful for the life I've been leading so far. There are so many reasons for that. We shouldn't spend much time in the past, but when we do, it should serve us as inspiration, motivation, and to restore the feeling of being thankful.

Somehow, the feeling of "I could've/should've done this/that, more/less" haunted me throughout my life. I thought it wasn't so constant, but seeing my own words on these pages is proof I just can't deny. Regardless of the parenting and schooling I got, the friends I was surrounded by, the time I spent in nature here and abroad, hours and hours of meditation and psychotherapy sessions... Also, it never let me be. Like, just idle. I HAD to be useful all the time! Ego was never satisfied with the results. It's like the most miserable divorced father figure that you can imagine... Wearing a brown-stained wife-beater but acting as my own dream-beater.

Allora is only checking-up on me once a month now, and with my monthly full health check-ups, I can agree that I am feeling better with each new moon. I spend a lot of time moon and star gazing whenever we've had a clear night. I was on the reclined camping chair even if it was freezing out. The other night, I brought a battery blanky, and I was snug as a bug. On some warmer nights, I fell asleep and woke up in the middle of the night, very reluctant to go back to my bed. This incredible show has been on live every night for billions of years, and I wasted so much of my life not doing this regularly. Thus, I should every day, without fail, behold upon a star and soil, beneath my feet, above my dome.

Bhumi regularly calls now; he has internet access once a week. He's doing so great in life, being 56 now and having his yin and yang in perfect harmony. I'd add "finally", but where was my equilibrium when I was 56? It's just slowly getting there now, when I'm nearing a century. I'm learning so much from that remarkable man, a beautiful

human being, every time we talk. He promised to come over this spring with a big fat hug for me to bring!

Bae and I are doing great after we both stopped mentioning Misha when we're around and voila, everything's back to normal. I don't think either of us holds a grudge or something sour. Being loving and considerate replaces fears and selfishness instantly. Carlo went to Libya for the whole year, but we holo-chat often, and the distance seems imperceptible. That is, if you disregard the complete lack of hugs. Holograms haven't progressed that far.

Funny how last year I mentioned fission and fusion reactors, and this year, the world's hundredth one, is up and running in Singapore. They've been becoming more efficient with each new model. Since so few people have been living there, their energy needs are very low anyway, so they mostly donate the generated electricity.

Another great global piece of news is that only a few countries haven't yet (entirely) forgiven the international debts. After fiat currencies and international banks lost their value and influence, with a resource-based economy now in almost every country, "money" loans are given as gifts, especially by the big countries that were proven historically guilty of exploitation. This doesn't mean, of course, that there is no more wealth gap between countries, but it's the smallest it has ever been so far in 2091.

I feel great pride in this small city-state of ours, which paved the way against all odds and showed others how things can be done differently if people are open-minded and brave enough to give it a go. In those years, humanity was suckling on the capitalist teat for too long and forgot about looking for an alternative food source. I'm sure we Isataionians could've done much more still, but just like myself, I don't want to have any regrets. I guess we have done the best with the cards that were dealt.

I could've loved Beardy more, though. He deserved it. I deserved it. I think so... maybe, at least. But I don't know if I could've done it then. It's easy to sit here now, being all comfy and wise, wishing for a travel machine, but... Until we access other dimensions with quantum physics through the unified field, why even bother with these thoughts? There's never enough love to go around, but somehow, everyone gives and gets just enough for the time being.

## Birthday #92

I was about to write my yearly report of my life, dotted with those very few real friends while adding a description of changes that happened in Isataion and the world. But this morning, I heard an old song from the yester, darker years that says: "None of us are free if one of us is chained".

It got me thinking deeply - we truly defeated slavery a couple of decades ago, but I don't think we should celebrate yet. There are still hundreds of millions of mistreated people living in sub-human conditions, suffering from physical and mental illnesses and not getting the treatments available to the rest - the #blessed ones.

We have improved our political and social systems to help people and restore the environment while giving everyone a better chance for the future. We can keep overhauling the system and fixing its bugs, but perhaps this is a waste of time, energy, resources and lives. What if this was the wrong system to start with? Maybe we went down the wrong path? Since we have managed to cope with it over time, we may have become blinded to other options.

The ruling and impossibly rich elite classes were replaced by a highly influential class of programmers and coders, a minute part of the population that can speak the secret language of the machines that serve us all so diligently. Occasionally, one can hear the news of a robotic assistant going berserk and hurting people by accident. Scapegoats are presented each time since it's always down to human error, either in programming or maintenance.

What worries me the most is that so many programs were coded by AI and double-checked by machine learning algorithms to keep track of some other programs. Owners, actual people, of these companies rarely take the blame, and they are a fraction of the percentage of the population that actually knows what really goes on. What kind of changes are they involved in, reprogramming and updating, if they are at all?

On the other hand, we have become too comfortable, ignorant and spoilt. Okay, I might be losing my hearing, and my fingers don't always do what I want them to, but at least this grandma knows how to get some shit done by herself. Some valuable things and skills that help

me deal with problems and basic needs, so I can still contribute to my community. I still don't know how to customise my AI assistant so that I don't have to double-check the speech-to-text dictation that I'm giving it right now. After so much work, it still makes mistakes. It doesn't fully understand why I'm saying things in a certain way and why sometimes it's okay to break the fucking rules.

How about a no-system system? Sure, we can call it anarchy, even though the original meaning has been long forgotten by most. I'm sure at the beginning it would be a bloody mess, for years, decades even, but surely humanity will prevail, love will take over, and people could be actually free. This century was marked by a distancing from the scientific mind and the embracing of the unknown, mystical and spiritual, which was shunned away for centuries. If we need a system of laws to govern us, doesn't that mean we don't trust each other? We still don't trust our pure, innate humanness.

UBI is in most countries nowadays, but it still isn't universal. Some brave, altruistic people keep trying to help out those stubborn countries, those confused nations and those scared rulers who don't treat their citizens fairly. But it's just not enough. We can't say that we have reached an egalitarian society when there are still so many people "in some faraway countries" that are still too far from true equality. Our hypocrisy continues, undying, after all these years.

Many people's roofs are leaking, living with their sickly grandparents who can't even get any pain relief. The black market of illegal and unnatural products is compelling, and many desperate people resort to it because they lack the options that we have readily available. They sustain themselves on sprouting potatoes and withered beans during winters, waiting for some donations from us that are never plentiful enough. Their soil and water have been poisoned so severely that they can't grow enough food. Thus, they again resort to the black market for chemical fertilisers. Climate change disasters have impacted them much more than us. Most of their youth has left those countries, never to come back. They just send money home to their families.

I don't accept being called heroic or important; most of us here didn't deserve that. Every child has equal potential, but even before it comes out of the womb, the odds are stacked against it.

## Birthday #93

I've just read the previous entry, and I must say that the whole year was not like that, ranty and depressive. I am actually feeling great and did feel good last year too, but whatever happens in December seems to influence my inspiration a lot. Actually, I want to call this year an easy one. I don't want to use good, bad, great or any of those adjectives – that's too subjective. A year is a year, no matter what I think of it. I have been returning to my lifetime mantra over and over again that there are no good or bad years, just the easy and the difficult ones.

Ivana, a lovely person but fresh out of school, is my new caretaker, not just in elderly care but also in living on the Periphery. She moved to Isataion two years ago. Her heart and mind are in their corresponding right places, that is for sure. She has that unique inat attitude that I remember having when I was younger, but now I'm just self-destructively stubborn. Evidently, she has the best intentions for my well-being and earnt my trust very quickly.

The physician that visits me by-monthly, called Farid, is an experienced doctor in his late 40s. He's not quite as gentle as Ivana in his approach, and he can be too assertive in communication. He made her once lose her temper, and although I did laugh at it then, a few days later, I realised I couldn't trust either of them or anyone for that matter, to know what was the best for me.

I don't like generalising, but I can't help noticing how younger people are always looking for shortcuts today. Not just regarding the use of technology, tools and apps but their approach to life, goals and relationships. I still believe in the Law of Least Effort, of course, but it doesn't mean that whenever you see an obstacle, you instantly give up on what you set out to do. That's as clear as a mountain spring, yet I don't know how to explain this to others. They just don't get it. For example, most of the young people I talked to don't want to meditate daily for months or weeks, even they just take a shortcut with Ayahuasca and other various psychoactive ceremonial medicine. I'm not against that; heck, Beatrice has been going back to it every few years whenever she plateaus with her spiritual development. Inward growth can be achieved in many other ways, which also require effort,

time, energy and, of course, money in some places. I feel so sad when I see people who went through the rituals yet, obviously, still haven't faced their demons, expecting them to just go away quietly. Oh boy, I wish they'd do that!

I see that this entry has also become a rant on how life is too easy for so many of us. Dammit! But people do forget that hard times create strong people. Strong people create good times. Good times create weak people. Weak people create hard times. I've reminded myself at least once each year. Suffering is necessary for profound change. I mean, just look what happens in nature every single day. Nature doesn't sit still, avoiding intensity or pain. You can't go for a dive in the ocean unless you pass the waves first. You can't be healthy if you don't break a sweat.

All the while, many of the younger people I meet here make fun of us oldies, especially when we act childishly (at least those still in touch with their inner child, not to mention the few senile ones). It's almost as if we are expected to become useless and dependent, unable to take care of ourselves. Farid wants me to move to the city because it's much closer to the main hospital, and Ivana wants me to stay at the farms, closer to nature. But aren't those arguments based on convenience and preference? I don't mind living here or there, especially since I haven't lived in the city for so long; I wouldn't mind the change. Changes bring changes.

It's hard being an optimist. I'm still a realist, which is obvious in my rants. But I still feel I can do some work and don't need to be babied wherever I am. I've always had a strong drive to give back to the community, being valuable and dependable. My body does not listen to me when I make demands sometimes, but I eventually get the tasks done. Someone occasionally needs to check on my finished work, but what the heck, the average work hours are 15! I'm called stubborn often as if that's only a negative trait. It helped me a lot throughout the years. Granted, it made my life unnecessarily complicated and brought pain, but that's how I grew and developed more. If one controls a trait like this, it can be a valuable tool, just like inat. Anyway, I'm tired of sitting here, I'm going for an evening walk and to make substantial upgrades to the neighbours' snowman, just to see how the kids react to it in the morning.

## **Birthday #94**

Farid has won me over with his arguments, but Ivana didn't want to "go down" without a fight. These two aren't going to speak to each other anymore and will take all necessary actions to avoid each other if they ever cross paths or streets. I honestly felt great moving back to the city, since my flat is in an excellent location, with a very warm and colourful neighbourhood. It felt very refreshing until this winter came.

Going to the Periphery from here is tedious for an old, tired grandma, especially in winter. I have hundreds of thousands of LUX, which I could use to summon a car to fetch me to... Kamchatka and back each day for the next 200 years or so! By the way, I have long ago decided to donate half to my loved ones equally and the other half to random deserving citizens.

There are too many people living here and not enough of food gardens to tend. It all looks beautiful, having food forests between most buildings, but the buildings are still taller than the trees. I heard that once the trees grow taller than a building, they'll start rebuilding them and maybe even tear some of them down. We've never had big earthquakes, but the buildings are almost a century old by now! I'd love to see one getting torn down and recycled. A dark part of me would enjoy witnessing that.

Objectively speaking, though, this city of ours is one helluva place to live. It betters any other city and town anywhere in the world. The people's mentality/demeanour is what makes it even more unique. Everyone came here for similar reasons; like-minded people are bound to function well together. Everything's natural-looking, clean and organized, but also seemingly wild. Many journalists visiting us said it looks like one of those cities from post-apocalyptic zombie movies and video games when nature reclaims the concrete after a few decades. Just not in a dilapidated, ruined way, of course! The greatest proof, I think, is the sheer number of visitors that came to check us out, decided to apply for citizenship and then... stayed. There are still naysayers, of course, and I know that I sometimes talk shit about having it overly nice here, but compared to the rest of the world, we've made something here to be genuinely proud of.

However, no matter how many prestigious awards we get, it doesn't mean that this place is perfect or that we are - no, sir! The lines between the "rural peasant" and the "posh city-dweller" are very blurry indeed. I'll stick around here for as long as I can, trying to understand what else we need here and how we can get there. Where is more happiness? And can we actually measure it somehow? I needed this change of perspective to see through the eyes of the convenient majority. In fact, still, 70% of Isataion's population lives in the city. But it must be noted that the population here is constantly declining while the Periphery keeps growing and growing. In a couple of decades, we'll reach the Caspian Sea and, in a century - the Russian border. I hope that border will be gone by then anyway, while the Sea is (again) rising up to meet us.

When November's snowflakes came, I must admit my frequency changed. Somehow, I don't understand how exactly, but... being indoors in this apartment in winter feels so different from being stuck in my tiny house. See, I just called that house MINE and not this apartment. Well, technically, neither are mine. In that old house, a young couple is living now that I knew through Carlo a while ago. Keeping oneself busy during this dark half of the year is paramount. I've never been bored in my life, ever! But my thoughts have dragged me to a dark, mouldy room with no windows. I don't want to end up there again. I've been refocusing on the NOW every single day, and so far, I'm doing good.

What drags me away are the memories. Especially in the shape of photos and videos with my dearest Misha. Reminiscing over the silly things we did, risky moments we had, and the not-so-occasional public sexcapades brings me joy but leaves me with a bitter taste in my mouth afterwards. I know this, yet I still go back for more, again and again. Especially these past couple of weeks. I'm wondering where is he now, how is he doing and feeling... Is he waiting for me somewhere, or has he been reincarnated into someone or something long ago? I can't lie to you, my dear diary, life without him feels so dull, stale and wrong. No amount of carefully thought out, daily to-do lists can keep these feelings at bay. And even after all these years, I still miss Mom and Dad. These were the three people that I loved the most. At least I still have my BB, Bea and Carlo here.

Dana's Birthdays  
**Summer Solstice 2095**

I've been having recurring dreams. I think... I feel I won't make it to see July, let alone December. It's late June, and the day is very bright and long, yet I feel... summoned. Waking up feels like going to sleep. Sometimes I even feel like someone up there made a mistake. With Misha... it's unfair! Who gets to choose who stays? If destiny is set and fate is determined, who sets that? Who is that bold to decide? I've been listening to quantum physics podcasts again, and death occupied my mind. At least in this dimension, it's inevitable.

It's simultaneously fascinating, funny and tragic how our species has progressed so far ahead of all the others, with our culture, civilisations, machines working for us, medicine saving us and philosophy expanding our consciousness... Yet many people today don't know how to walk, talk or even breathe properly.

After all we have been through, we still complain about our "big" problems. Objectively speaking, they've never been smaller in our history, of all mankind, considering how we've harnessed technology and expanded our understanding of our world, this reality, on this planet. How are, after all, so many people still so self-absorbed, so egoistic and narrow-minded? Living in the past and worrying about the future while ignoring this present - is so wasteful and sad...

Our Sun will inevitably succumb to entropy after becoming a white dwarf. Then billions of years later, it will probably disintegrate its protons and let a universe of black holes come onto the ever-expanding stage. Even longer in time, over an unimaginable number of years, this universe of dancing black holes will extinguish itself, succumbing to dark matter and dark energy which will last trillions of trillions of years more than all of our existence here on this Pale Blue Dot. 'Tis terribly beautiful, don't you agree?

So why ponder, suffer and complain? Death is as inevitable as birth. Perhaps this reality, this whole universe of ours, is a creation of another intelligence from yet another parallel one. Thus, the best we can do is to become aware of it all and try to align, synchronise with it and eventually join it. Maybe it's inevitable, or maybe science is wrong? Or maybe I'm going senile and refusing to take my medication. Maybe it doesn't really matter.

*Dana died the next day; she just didn't wake up that morning. She left Bhumi, Beatrice, Carlo and many others behind with a gaping holes in their hearts. She went onwards the same way Mom, Dad, Misha and others have. Maybe in another life she will get to meet an old TaiChi master in a small Jambudstan restaurant, but she, or now maybe he, won't be able to recognize him. Perhaps if he then would mention how he had a nickname Bali Boy, that might reignite their connection through a mutual perplexed gaze.*

## So, what now?

Why did I label this book “realistic fiction”? I firmly and genuinely believe that Isataion is possible today. Technology is already ready for this, but cooperation between individuals is lacking. Everything we do affects the world around us, and we affect every person we meet. Yet, many of us feel powerless and alone. As ultimately, YOU have the power, the least you can do is invest in yourself. We are all chrysalis butterflies that can catalyse global change. With that challenge in mind, if you are interested, I would like to suggest you a seven-step guide on how to start this butterfly effect and create lasting, positive changes with ease:

### **1. Improve posture and listen to your body**

We can all treat our bodies better, and a mindset change can come about by simply keeping your spine erect, especially while sitting. Just being more physical in general is vital. Our bodies are our physical hosts here in this material world. Therefore, we need to get physical with them. Use them daily, articulate those limbs with any exercise - like yoga, taijiquan, or just taking a walk, but with a purpose. You will feel better about yourself, have fun, experience the world around you and discover new, perhaps hidden depths of your body. Don't forget to hydrate it, feed it well and give it solid, regular sleep.

### **2. Become aware of your consequences on the environment**

You do not need to go straight up minimalist-tiny-house-organic-raw-vegan all of a sudden. But you know, in time, Mother Earth knows you could. Simplifying your life and taking responsibility for your actions are much needed today, especially in developed countries. We should not ruin everyone's world for the sake of convenience and our lazy habits. You and I are already suffering from the mistakes of the previous generation. A positive side effect is that you will become healthier, not need pharmaceuticals and save money, which, you will agree, will definitely help on your challenging journey ahead.

### **3. Build a positive attitude, ethics and principles**

Your physical initiation will spark your mental activation; you just need to keep giving it fuel – self-motivation. After repetition, witness it and trust yourself more! Know that everything will be alright, that all that

happened - should and that right now, you are precisely where you need to be. Build principles that will keep this attitude going in a noble direction. It doesn't matter how long you were lying, being rude to others, selfish or lazy in the past. There is no better time than now to return to your true path. Only you will select what you feel is important, not society, family, your partner or me. Just look into your heart, and you will find out. Also, take notes of this, as future reminders.

#### **4. Give your mind a break and search for your true self**

Having trouble finding yourself, sifting through the layers of - opinions, thoughts, beliefs - your ego? You will need to disconnect from anything and anyone trying to assert their beliefs on you. This might be more difficult, especially if you live in a busy place, listen to mass media and partake in social networks. The body and mind need rest. You could start with meditation or qigong. Just keep digging, softly.

#### **5. Work on your skills and boost confidence**

...skills, talents, career or that dream of yours that you gave up a long time ago. But do not forget about communication skills, which might be the most important. This, in turn, increases your confidence and self-esteem even more. Also, if you do not expect any outcome and attach to one or obsess with it, you will not worry about the future. Be realistically kind to yourself. The future is not yet.

#### **6. Be brave, take chances and share it all**

Do not give up when it gets difficult. Life is not supposed to be easy all the time, when would we ever learn then? Be bold and daring, and with many (many) failures, you will get exactly what you need. Be aware, that you need those "failures". However, in all that conquest, do not forget to be selfless and share what you know, what you have and what you can do. Those talents are not given to you to bask in them all by yourself. Speak well, do well, be well... and all will be well if you're wise, kind and useful. A better you means a better world, for us all, citizens of the Earth, including even algae and worms.

**7. Oh yes, please remember that you're never alone, as people continuously enter and leave your life. Thus, no one is yours. You just be a loving reminder for them while they're around and be grateful for their presence in return.**

