



A STORY BY ALINA ȘERBAN

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*Translated from Romanian by
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Dedicated to kids, adults and all
living beings without a shelter.



fundatia9





When I was small, I remember one winter me and mom were sticking labels on jars of jam.

<HDHGGSJGGXHESKZJJSHHBDHYGTAZSYHSHJAT!>


A really harsh noise!

This scary bulldozer came and ate our house entirely and all the jars broke. Mom was crying, she was trying to gather some things and was shouting:

“My pans! Wait, they were brand new!”.

Scared, I turned myself into a little dot. No!
Even smaller, until even I couldn't see myself anymore.





I felt the ground cracking beneath us. Ever since that time with the bad bulldozer, they brought us here. And mom told them:

"This is not a home meant for human beings. It's dirty and it stinks really bad. What person would like living among trash?"

Back in our home it smelled like strawberries. Here we don't make jams anymore, mom says we don't have anything to prepare them with.





Now I'm big, I can reach any door knob. When it's hot, I like to go with mom and help her, she cleans other people's houses and in the summer washes their carpets, and this is what I like the most.

We go with our own bucket, with brushes big and small, and I scrub along with her, and then she lets me slide all the way down the rug.

"I once found out how to make big bubbles and burst them while sliding by. Incomiiiiing!"



The garbage dump is sometimes so big, that you have the feeling there is no room left for the sky.

The car arrived! There is a looot of stuff people throw out that's still nice. Pssst! I look back to check mom doesn't see me. She does not let me come here, it's dangerous and I'll get dirty. She fetches water from far away. —> See, here from our place there is this kind of mud path, and you go aaaall the way down, and then you wait until you get a ride from someone, and if no-one passes by, you go on foot until close to the city where there is a drinking fountain that sometimes doesn't work, and then you have to ask people nicely, and it's so sad when they tell you "NO".



Elena pulls the arm of a doll with yellow hair, while the other arm is pulled by... a very big rat.



Frowning a bit, the girl pulls harder and catches the doll in her arms.

The rat gets angry, and runs after her. Elena runs so fast. She is almost back to the place where she lives, and thinks she lost the rat. She smiles and gets to look at the captured doll when... the rat jumps in her face. She tries to fool it, and they are chasing each other around her mother's bucket.

The girl completely forgets how hard it's for her mom to fetch water, and that this water was meant for a nice bath tonight. She throws the water on the rat, thinking this will defeat it, but upon the water's touch, the rat's hair gets all so pretty like in the commercials.



Elena gets even more scared, and puts the bucket on top of it.



She kicks it with her leg, and the rat rolls all the way down while inside the bucket.



The bucket breaks.



The rat, after so many spins, decides to run.



The girl now understands she broke her mum's bucket that she used for work, and in which she also fetched water. And... the water is gone too. She's crying, but then tells herself "I have to fix this, I have to bring back some water, and mum's bucket."



Elena mounts on top of all this garbage, from where you can see the whole world. She whistles in the air, and a big crow appears. Elena is sad, still crying, she looks at her doll and tells the crow:



"I don't want to be like... me anymore, I wanna be like her, like all girl princesses. What beautiful hair she has, kids like her never play with me."

The crow tells her: "You are beautiful exactly the way you are."

The crow leaves her in front of a building, where there are a lot of kids wearing the same pajamas, looking out the window and seeming so lonely.


The crow lifts Elena again and puts her on a window sill. She enters that room, and loves it so much. It looks so good compared to where she lives.



Elena marvels while looking through the room. Wow, they have everything! Looks like a room where kids live. She heads towards the switch and flicks the button, it's so easy! Click, click, click, on and off. Now this is a "home". On, off, click, so easy. A sniffle is heard.
<inssss nnnn hhhh>



On the bed there is a girl. She is Sad, with capital S.



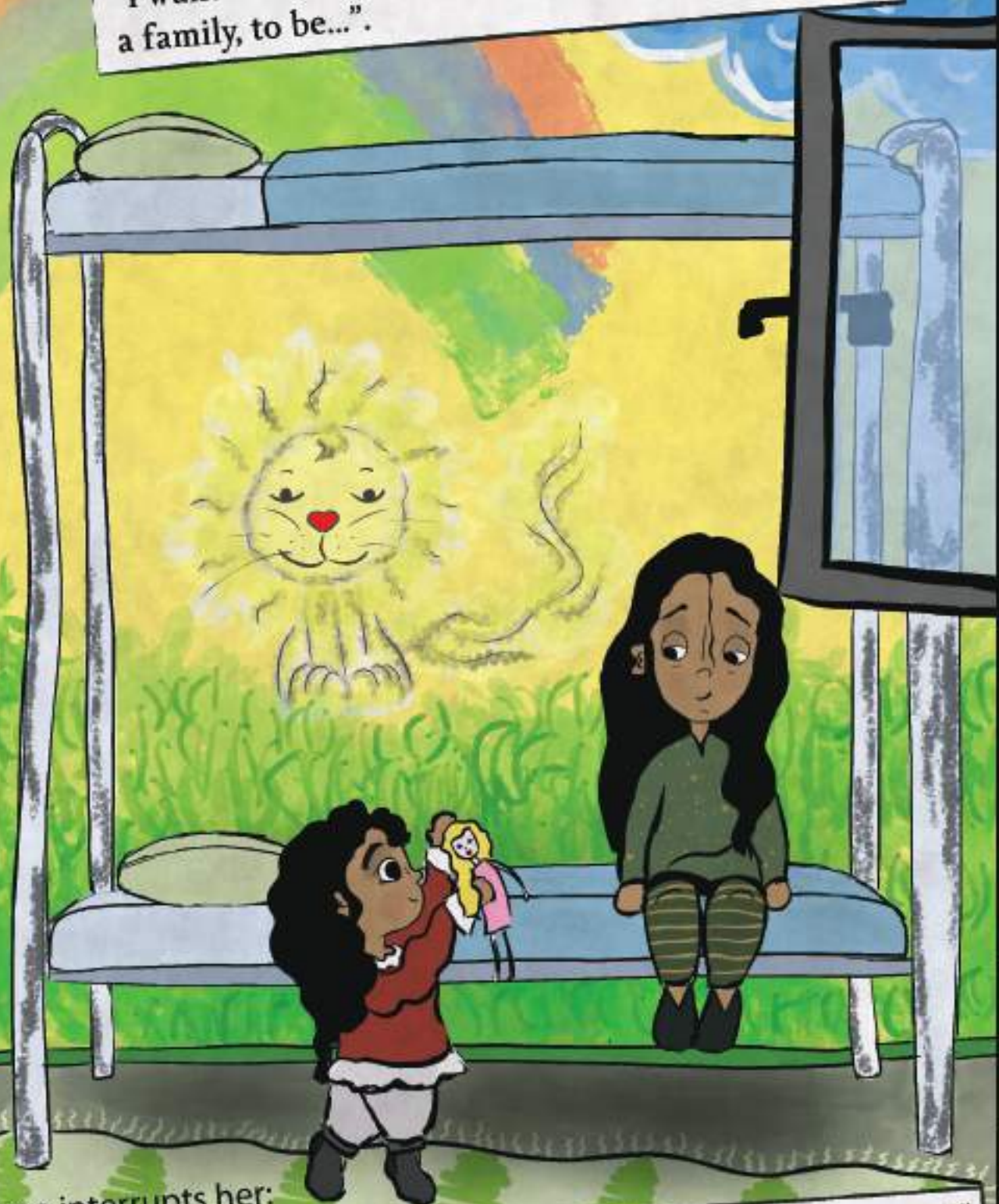
Roberta - girl number 67 here - explains to Elena that only mothers on a schedule live here, and children, big and small, with whom she sometimes fights. Some kids have parents that live elsewhere. Lots of times they go "home - to their family". Roberta wishes she could do that as well.



Today is Roberta's birthday. The most favorite mother on a schedule, the best one, with soft hands, a beautiful voice and smelling of vanilla sugar... didn't come today. Her real-real daughter is ill, and she had to switch shifts with another mother on schedule. The vanilla sugar mother would not have forgotten that today's her birthday, but now... Everyone has forgotten, the whole world, the whole universe has forgotten.

Elena takes another look at the captured doll, and gives it to Roberta. The girls hug. Roberta looks at the blonde doll, hugs her too, and says:

"I want to be like her, like the girls who get to have a family, to be..."



Elena interrupts her:

"You're good and beautiful exactly the way you are."

Elena: You can come to our place whenever you want!
My mum can also be your mum!

Roberta: And you can come here to have a bath.
I'll sneak you in.

Elena: Ah, yes! Mum! The bucket! Can you give me a bucket with
water in it, for my mum, I mean, for our place? I think you have
several here.

Roberta: I'd give you one, but I can't.
Nothing that's here is mine,
nothing makes this my home.



They look at each other, sigh, and smile. "It's so good to have
friends", the girls utter in their minds.


The girls walk with the gentleman living on the street and his small radio. They walk together along one, two streets, and pass by big and small houses, grey or green or yellow, buildings with dried →

A man with a white beard and a cap is walking through a city street at night. He is wearing a blue jacket over a yellow shirt and grey pants. He is carrying a small radio in his hand. The background shows a dense cityscape with many buildings of various colors (grey, green, yellow) and heights. The sky is dark with some light streaks. The man is looking towards the viewer with a slightly concerned expression.

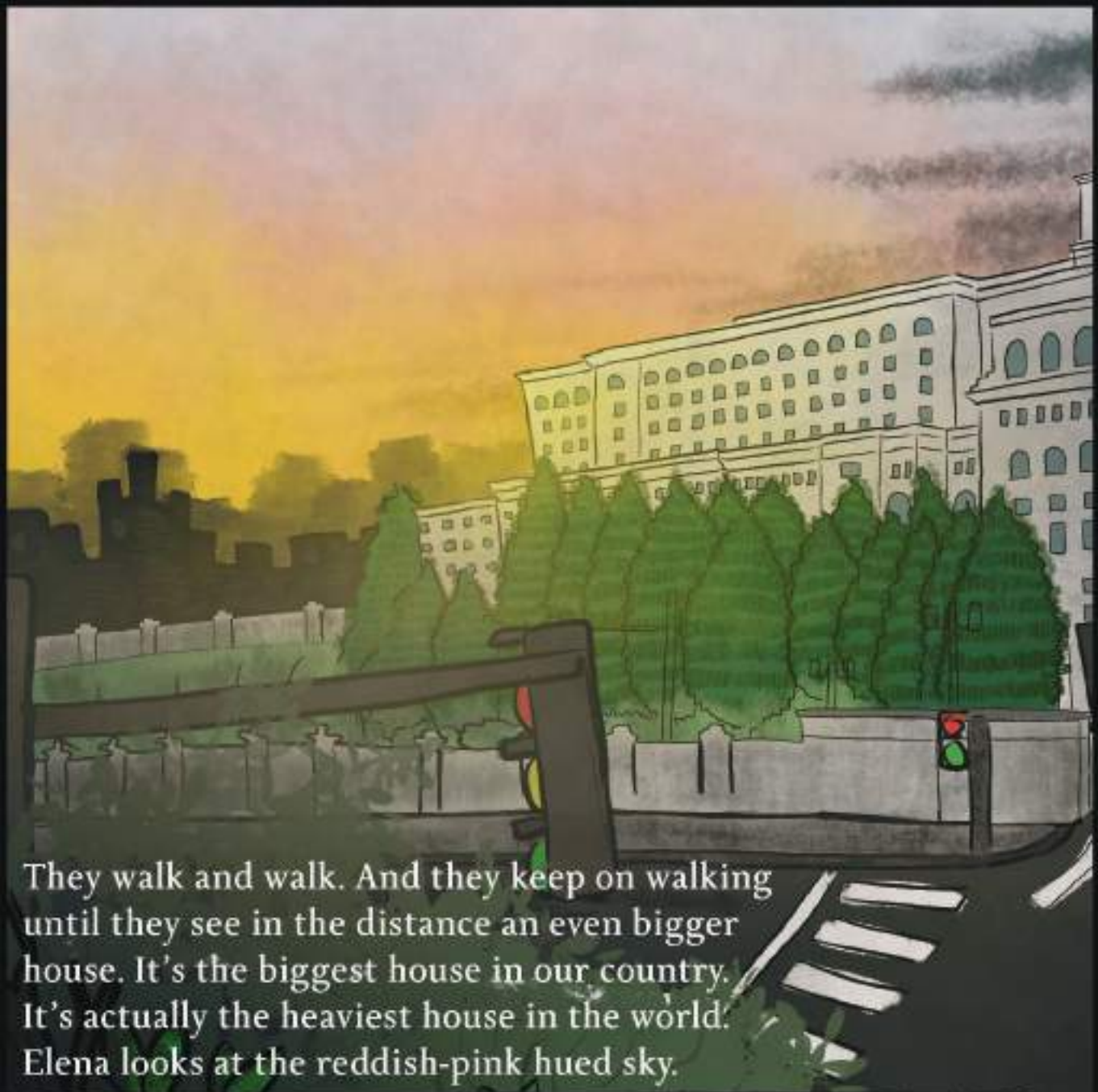
The girls walk down the street, and hear:

“Don’t you have a leu, perhaps? Or maybe a battery? This small radio is my friend, and he lost his voice now.”

vegetation on top and on their sides, like frizzy hair, with attics, balconies, windows with several layers of dust, with curtains that were once clean, with doors, gates, fences and locks. The three of them look at so many houses through which the wind blows.



"Come with us! We are looking for a bucket."



They walk and walk. And they keep on walking until they see in the distance an even bigger house. It's the biggest house in our country. It's actually the heaviest house in the world. Elena looks at the reddish-pink hued sky.

Elena: "It will get dark soon and I must head back home... but I don't want to return without fixing what I have broken."

Gheorghe: "Everyone makes mistakes. I am sure your mother is waiting for you at home. I suggest that we split up, maybe we will find something around this big house."

In the pupils of their eyes you can see this big and tall building, and next to it the dome of a very imposing and rich church.

The three of them split up in order to go around the whole building. Gheorghe gives each girl a leaf and says:

"Use this to whistle, so it's easier to find one another."



His eyes descend along this big house all the way down to the fence. The sun rays pierce through the shapes in the fence, etching models on the asphalt.

He is going faster and notices that, whenever he quickens his steps, the sun-fence patterns remind him of the way he saw the world while aboard the trains, when he was working as a train mechanic.

He used to go through mountains, passing by bodies of water, meadows with cows and sheep, next to flocks of birds, and swarms of butterflies.

With his small radio that was accompanying him onboard trains, in train stations, the cabins of electrical and sometimes even steam engines, all with their own control panels. And how he would sneak through all the hard to reach places, through all the noise and dirt, and yet how he was enjoying it all so much.

The shadow of Mister Gheorghe carries years of memories from when he used to be a train mechanic, visible only to him. For the rest of the people, Gheorghe is just a homeless man, turned invisible.

He senses something bothering his foot, his heel, oh, a pebble got stuck in the sole of his boots, boots so old that they lost all colour.

He looks closer and notices a whole chunk of the sole fell off.



THE MINISTRY OF
USELESS THINGS

He continues walking with his heel completely out, and it makes him even sadder.

A bitter, bitter tear hangs at the corner of his eyelid, runs down his cheek all the way to his neck as if going down a slide. He continues walking, and notices something in the corner of his eye. He doesn't pay attention, yet after a few steps his mind tells him he had passed something interesting. He passed by a sign, an arrow pointing towards the Ministry of Useless Things.

He follows the arrow and reaches a huge parking lot filled with lots of containers displaying different messages: "too many dots", "too few dots", "unpaired", and many others. He takes out the leaf, and whistles, so that the girls join him.

In the parking lot, the containers were being lifted by a heavy machinery, a cousin of the scary bulldozer with 3 heads, which spills everything in a ravenous machine that melts them and makes a heavy cloud that coughs loudly.

Startled, the girls look around and run fast towards the container that's just being lifted by the machinery. Elena jumps quickly on one of the wheels of the container. Meanwhile, she notices how its label is falling off.

She spells it out:
"a s-c-r-a-t-c-h, a scratch".

Elena does some reading exercises with her mom at home, she doesn't attend school although she really wants to, but her mother is always putting money away for them to move from this place, so that one day she will be able to attend school.



She pulls herself towards the lid.



She gets inside the container and finds lots of brand new buckets, and broomsticks, meant to be melted down because they had just ONE scratch.

"I found it! Stop!"


She tries to open the door of the container, but it's stuck.

"Oh, no. Help!"




The machinery is still holding the container up in the air, waiting for the melting machine to finish its last container.

Mister Gheorghe and Roberta run fast behind the machinery and take a closer look.

A girl with dark hair and large eyes, wearing a grey dress with a red bow, stands in a field of tall, yellow and orange grass. She is looking upwards with a shocked expression. The background is dark and indistinct.

Elena cries:
"I am scared,
please help!"

They must find out how to halt it. Mister Gheorghe notices a small, tiny button up above, but he cannot reach it.

A close-up of a hand holding a lit match. The match is on fire, with bright yellow and orange flames. The background is dark and indistinct.

Roberta says: "Yes,
I see it."

Roberta climbs quickly on his shoulders and reaches the button.

She presses it. Nothing happens. She notices that this wasn't a button, but a tiny hole meant for a sort of thin key. Roberta's heart beats so hard, as if it's climbed into her throat.

Elena cries: "I am scared, please!"

Roberta looks around, looks down, touches her face, and then by force of habit puts her hands in her pocket. She finds a hairpin.

She never pulls her hair up, but she's always told to have it "well kept" just in case possible parents were to visit. And there is no way they would want a girl with messy hair, as the mothers on schedule tell her.

She takes the hairpin out of the pocket. She tries to straighten it. It's hard, but she doesn't give up. She straightens it, even though it's hurting her fingers. She thrusts it quickly in the place where the button was supposed to be. The machinery stops completely.


Together, they pull Elena out of the container.

Together they find other containers there, with everything inside.

Boots of different colours - that's true, but at least for both feet, and brand new! They also found batteries for the small radio. The crow arrived too, and they all were overjoyed and danced happily.

boots

batteries



Years passed by, and
the three of them
instituted the Ministry
of Useful Things where
no-one, no human, no
living being, is left
without a good home.

Where empty
"homes" and
churches are
inhabited by
humans and
earthlings.

Where kids play
with all the other
kids, and they go to
school, and each
summer hold
championships of
sliding down rugs
filled with big bubbles
made out of soap.

Incomiing!





Story inspired by real life events