

**MACDONALD**  
**by Palmi Ranchev**

translated from the Bulgarian by Angela Rodel

Remember my dad, how he always sat in the kitchen by the window, just like on that afternoon. Drinking red wine.

“Are you going to the café?” Mom asked him. “You’re usually gone by now.”

“I’m going,” he replied indifferently, before unexpectedly adding: “Y’all could come along.”

“Y’all” meant mom and me. Dad was working at a café on Graf Ignatiev.<sup>1</sup> He ran a towel over the tables and carried in cases of soda and beer. I didn’t see him doing much else. He was usually there in the afternoon and late evening. The rest of the time he sat in the kitchen by the window. Drinking red wine and grumbling about life. He had a BA in engineering, yet here he was forced to hang around in some café.

“What are you waiting for, get dressed!” Dad called.

“So you’ve finally decided to take us out,” mom huffed peevishly. “We haven’t gone out since I don’t know when.”

“To take us out,” he laughed and again lifted his glass. “We’re going to MacDonald.”

That was the best thing that could’ve happened to me at that time. The minute he got a little extra money, dad took us to MacDonald. I always corrected him, telling him there was an “s” on the end. But he stuck to his guns – MacDonald. I didn’t pipe up now, I was that happy. The main attraction was the toy in the Happy Meal box. Mom usually just got a coke, while he sat gawking or reading the free newspaper.

“Just let me take a quick shower and I’ll be ready,” mom said, giving him a quizzical look. “Or should we just leave now?”

“I’m gonna take a shower, too,” I put in after her.

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<sup>1</sup> A popular street in central Sofia lined with shops and cafes.

“Let the kid take a shower,” dad agreed and immediately added: “Then afterwards we can go pay the bills. The water and electricity. Good thing we turned off the heat, at least.”

“So should I shower or not?” Mom asked.

“I, for one, am not going to shower. But you decide for yourself.”

Dad usually drank a bottle and a half. Then he would buy two more bottles and again drink a bottle and a half. Now he was drinking from three half-empty bottles. He had lined them up next to the balcony door so they’d be within reach, and because our refrigerator had long since stopped working.

“I want to wear my green dress,” I announced.

“Are you out of your mind?” Mom, already in her slip, asked indignantly. “A summer dress in November?”

“OK, fine, what do you want me to wear?”

I was afraid that dad would quickly get fed up with our eternal squabbling before going out. It was different when it was just the two of us. Then we could squabble all we wanted. It was even fun sometimes. Mom always wanted me to wear something I didn’t want to wear. The opposite was also true: I always wanted to wear something she didn’t want me to. Now I was ready to wear even the most abominable outfit, say that woolen dress with the big buttons on the collar, just to go to MacDonal’d’s.

“Are we going to take a cab?” Dad asked as we were standing in front of the elevator.

“Of course we’ll take a cab,” I hasten to put in.

“Let’s not pretend to be something we’re not,” mom said.

“What are you trying to say?” dad asked.

“That’ll be another three leva wasted.”

Dad shrugged, in any case the elevator had come. We had a Zhiguli<sup>2</sup> with flat tires. It was parked in front of the apartment block. I say this as an addendum to the argument about how we

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<sup>2</sup> An old Soviet-made car.

should get there. The two of them didn't pay any attention to the Zhiguli at all. I alone glanced at it. There are people who drive Zhigulis.

"Are you drunk?" Mom asked after a few steps.

"Should I answer that?" Dad said with a laugh. "Or are you just asking?"

"I'm going back home," she said. "You go on with your daughter if you want."

I would often warn them: don't fight like little kids. Then they would laugh and stop fighting. They didn't pay any attention to me if they'd already started yelling, though. They would keep at it until they both finally shut up. Sometimes for a whole week. So then, as we were walking to the bus stop, I kept a sharp eye on how things were developing, so I could jump in in time.

Bus No. 11 came almost immediately. But there were so many people waiting at the stop that we were hardly able to get on. Inside it was packed, too. I could hardly breathe. Very aptly, Dad hissed: "God damn it!"

He grabbed on to one of the hanging leather hand straps and let his head loll onto one shoulder. A magnificent blimp of a woman had settled into the seat across from him. She eyed him with suspicion. The two other passengers from the double seat also looked him over. Dad, to my satisfaction, was positively dangling by his arm, not paying them any attention. Mom found a free seat and called me over. Her face hadn't lost its sulky expression. As if she were not calling me, but continuing to argue with dad. I went over to her. I was sad that dad was standing there, hanging his head. He was alone. And everyone around him was looking at him. Just then he made a barely perceptible move with his shoulders. Or rather with the one shoulder that was hanging down. And then sonorously puked. He had never done that before. He drank red wine every day. But that was the only time he puked.

We hadn't gone to MacDonald's in six months. I can calculate that now. But then it simply seemed like we hadn't been there for an unbearably long time. I didn't even know what toys they had anymore. Things were different when dad had had a steady job. He'd been an engineer. And not some ordinary lackey/manager in some café belonging to his childhood friend. The main thing they sold there, he told me once, was drugs.

Dad puked on all three of them. The blimp let out a howl. But he puked again, this time only on her, and she shut up, her arms outstretched.

Dad wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his jacket. He looked somehow winded. I was on the verge of tears. But the bus stopped and dad waved. He headed towards the door without turning around. We got off after him. I was sure the whole bus was watching us. It wasn't such a big deal. Soon we were simply walking down the sidewalk. I wondered whether we would reach MacDonald's, just walking like that. Or were we heading the wrong direction? Then dad started laughing.

"Well, I fixed them," he said and added: "Yep, I sure fixed them."

Mom kept huffily silent. She clearly thought he had puked especially because of her, to make her look bad.

"Did you see the look those heifers gave me?"

"What heifers?" I asked.

He didn't answer. He kept laughing, much more quietly now. Soon I relaxed as well. We were going the right way. The route was now familiar. Mom no longer seemed to think dad had puked especially because of her, and took him by the arm.

"The wine in one of those bottles had gone sour."

"It wasn't just from the wine."

"What else was it from?" she asked.

"Everything!" dad replied and added: "Absolutely everything."

The big M of MacDonald's was already in sight. And it wasn't just me, it seemed like all three of us picked up our pace. The M was spinning slowly. Yes, exactly: spinning. I had never noticed that before. I closed my eyes and opened them again: it kept spinning. And if someone had asked me why I was smiling, I would've answered: simply because of that.