

Yulia (Man to Beautiful Ukrainian Woman TG)

By FoxFaceStories

A Lottery Winner Story for EJWN

Scott is an introverted software engineer who inexplicably wakes up one morning in the body and apartment of his beautiful neighbour Yulia, a Ukrainian fitness instructor. After an initial panic, Scott sets out to find his original body, which must therefore contain Yulia's mind - except that when he does, his original body seems to also possess his mind! What is going on? And where is the real Yulia!?

Yulia

I wake up to a weird alarm going off beside me. What the hell? Since when did I even *have* a bedside alarm? And besides, why on earth would I want to be getting up at 5am? I quickly reach over to the bedside table to quickly shut it down, only to nearly fall off of the bed. Wait, that's another weird thing. My bedside table is on the left side, but the alarm is ringing from the right. I managed to get it, but I grunt as I do so, releasing a strange sound that is oddly squeaky. God, I must have slept weird. My body feels so weak, like I'm smaller, and it's oddly lumpy. Have I contracted something and that's why I'm getting all confused? It would make sense, given how lumpy my chest feels. But that's when I notice that this room doesn't even *look* like mine. The walls are the wrong colour, a soft lilac rather than the plain white I have. And there is a framed poster of an all-girl metal band that I can just perceive in the very early morning darkness, one that has some kind of name but in Cyrillic from the looks of it.

"Shcho za chort?" I say.

And that's when I truly realise something weird is going on, because not only did I just speak with a *woman's* voice, but whatever language I just spoke wasn't remotely English at all. It's enough to wake me up completely and tear off the blankets, sending stuff careening all over the floor and knocking half the contents off of the bedside table. Even in the bare light that filters from the gaps in the blinds beside me, I can see that there is something seriously, *seriously* wrong with me. This is not the body of Scott Palmer, software engineer and total shy introvert. This is the body of a *lady*. A lady with *boobs*. I know it's completely juvenile to think in those terms, but I have actual *boobs* on my chest. They're rising and falling with each breath and I can *feel* their weight.

"Oh Bozhe!" I exclaim in my husky morning voice that is nevertheless very female. "I mean, oh my God! This has to be a dream, right?"

But it feels so real, and more than that, I now recognise the voice coming from my mouth. It's a beautiful voice, slightly husky but in an attractive way - that touch of vocal fry

that I can never forget, and if that didn't give it away, the fact that I'm speaking with an obvious Slavic accent would seal the deal anyway. This is *Yulia Shevchenko's* body. She's the Ukrainian immigrant who lives in the apartment literally opposite mine in the shared complex we reside in. She's a woman I've been thinking about for over a year, ever since she moved in. Yulia is probably the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. She has the most lovely blonde hair, and yet her eyebrows are dark and thick, and her cheekbones could seriously cut glass. She has the most infectious smile, and is only a few years younger than me; twenty seven years old, I think. She certainly takes care of herself; I try not to notice, and she usually wears thicker clothing in the cold atmosphere of our shoddy apartment complex, but when I *have* seen her in a shirt and pants, it's clear that she has a lovely figure and lovely breasts. But it's that smile I often think of, the way she is always so full of optimism.

We've actually talked quite a bit, though I admit I'm always nervous in her presence. Yulia fled the war and managed to secure a long-term residency on her visa, and she's working hard to eventually acquire US citizenship. I've seen her *at* work, in fact. I've been trying to improve myself by going to the gym lately, and it was actually at her encouragement when we were talking about jobs and I was complaining about my back pain. She said it was probably from sitting down all day and that she could always help me, since she works as a fitness instructor at a place called EZ Gym. So I started going there, hoping to see her, but she's always busy with clients, so we only occasionally talk during her breaks, and I don't have too much to say. How could I, when she's wearing a sports bra and yoga pants, and I'm too shy to ever, ever flirt with her like that, let alone consider asking her on a date? It doesn't help that hasn't been coming to the gym nearly as often lately, and I can never quite figure out when she'll be there.

But now, inexplicably, it seems that I *am* her. It can't be, and yet it is. I quickly get out of bed, only to stumble and nearly fall over. Her apartment is a bit messier than mine, but it's not the pile of clothes at the foot of the bed that I nearly fall over, but my own feet. My entire centre of gravity has shifted; it's lower now thanks to these hips and my shorter frame, but then there's also the fact that there's an obvious pair of weights upon my chest, not to mention my long blonde hair which goes all the way down to my waist. How does she manage it?

It doesn't take me long to find the lights, at least. Her apartment is a mirror of mine, only she appears to have a lot more ornamentation, including various photos of her family, who must still be residing in west Ukraine, away from the frontlines. There's an old square box of a television, complete with a VHS player below it, which is kinda weird and old school. Why would she have that? It's not a mystery I stay invested in, though. I feel a little guilty, because I should be feeling desperately worried for Yulia, and trying to figure out where she

is, but all I can really focus on is the fact that I've currently got a very female body, and my top half is naked, my boobs bouncing around a bit and forcing me to hold them while I get my bearings.

"A bra," I say in my accent. "No, first see if you are really Yulia."

It actually takes a little bit of focus to avoid speaking in the Ukrainian tongue. How do I even know it? It's like it has just entered my mind, somehow. Does that mean she is still in here with me? God, that would be horrible. I hope not, but I have to prioritise what I'm focusing upon, so I shut that thought out and make my way to the bathroom, which is the same as mine but on the opposite side to where it is in my place, and certainly has a *lot* more makeup items upon the shelves.

And there she is.

There I am.

Yulia Shevchenko in the flesh, but not in the mind. I'm not wearing any makeup, and I'm just wearing a set of striped red and white pajamas like I'm trying to cosplay as an All-American gal or something. But I'm still beautiful as hell, even if my hair is a mess and my eyes are a little bit tired. I still have those pouty lips and slightly almond-shaped eyes that have the most pale blue irises you can imagine, like icy crystals. And then there are the, well, the breasts. I can't help but cup them. These things were already nicely sized when I talked to Yulia, but now I can actually *feel* them and see them from above, and they seem so much bigger. They have to be Double-D's or something, but then again I don't really know women's sizes. I've not exactly gone out with many women before, and it's been a dry spell for a couple of years now.

"Okay," I say to my reflection, concentrating on speaking in English despite the slight mental strain. "So you're stuck in Yulia's body. You're still Scott Palmers. You're still *you*, man. But something has gone wrong. And if you're in Yulia's body, then that means . . .

I gasp, and I sound like a total female as I do it. Hell, I even place my hand over my mouth in an automatic female gesture. But it all makes sense. Whatever weird cosmic thing has made me take Yulia's body must also be the case for my body! After all, who else could be in there right now?

I flee the room, ready to head out and knock on his - that is, *my* - door. But in the act my boobs flop all about and my hair gets in my face and I nearly trip on my loose pajama pants which go almost to the soles of my little feet, and I realise how stupid I'm being.

"Get dressed, you idiot," I declare. "Plus, Yulia is probably asleep in your body. You have a little time."

It's only 5.22am to judge from her bedside alarm clock, and I need to be alert and sharp. I take a quick shower, and I try to be as respectful of Yulia's body as possible. I'm no creep. I like her. I like her a lot, actually, but having her body isn't exactly a turn on. I mean, it

makes sense; I'm in a bit of a panic here, though I would have thought I'd at least be a little aroused by the sight of these breasts and her curves. Instead, I just go about my business as quickly as I can, trying to do that towel thing with the hair that women do and only getting it on the fourth or fifth try. She clearly doesn't shave down there; there's a darker bush obscuring my sight of my new vulva, and I'm fairly okay with that. Thank you, Yulia.

I don't put on any makeup, though it's weird, because I feel like part of me knows how to. I look at the lipstick and realise that the knowledge *is* there, and that fact scares me. What if I become more and more like Yulia the longer I spend in her body? What if it eclipses the real me and I start losing my actual memories?

It's enough to make me move faster. I get dressed as quickly as I can, putting on some of her underwear, a pair of comfortable jeans that show off my hips, and then a shirt and jacket. Ah, but then I have to take them off because my boobs need support; I'm seriously jiggling here. I'm surprised when I uncover a bra - turns out she's an E-cup. I guess a Double-D isn't quite as big as the movies make them out to be? Don't get me wrong, she's got a large chest, even larger now that it's temporarily *my* chest, but they don't seem overwhelmingly huge.

That is, until I get the bra on properly, which takes time. Then my new boobs are lifted up, and the cleavage on display makes me a little nauseous. I bet I look amazing. Shoot. I really need to get out of this body, because for a second there I was sort of *okay* with that notion. I throw on a shirt and then the jacket again, just to cover up. I quickly raid her kitchen just to eat some bananas and a couple of oat bars - it's all healthy stuff in there, of course - and then I march towards the door. I can certainly tell that while this body is weaker than mine, it's rather strong for a woman's. Flexible, too, and with a nice midriff. No wonder she always has customers as a fitness instructor. Mind, I'd heard some complaining at EZ Gym that she'd been dropping a lot of customers and sessions lately. Maybe she just had too many creeps or something. I mean, with a body like this . . .

No, stop it, Scott! Stop perving on Yulia's body. Just because you're currently in it doesn't give you the right. There's a reason you tried not to look at her breasts too much while putting on your bra. Be respectful!

I keep that in mind as I leave the apartment. It's past 6am at this point, and I can only hope that Yulia is starting to wake in my body, or else she might be in for a major panic. There's no other way, though, and I don't want to waste any more time, especially since time may actually turn out to be an issue. I wince a little at my damp hair down my back, getting my jacket - her jacket - wet. I should have left it in a towel longer.

"Here goes," I say in my lovely Ukrainian accent.

I knock upon the door.

No response.

I knock more heavily, and then more frequently, until finally I hear a loud groan from the other side, and a male voice identical to the one that should be mine calls out.

“Hold up, I’m coming! I’m coming!”

Poor Yulia. She’s going to be in for a big surprise. I try to think of what to say, and automatically shift to putting my hand on my hip and cocking it to the side a little, just like Yulia does. Damn it, I’ve definitely inherited her muscle memory, just like how even my thoughts are in Ukrainian - I have to keep translating them into English words even when I talk to myself!

Finally, the door opens, and a very sleepy looking *me* opens it, eyes narrowed from having just woken, and still wearing those silly checkered orange pajamas that make me look like a prison convict or something.

“Hello? Oh, Yulia. S-sorry, I was asleep. Can I help you?”

For a moment, I have no idea what to say, and for two terrible reasons. The first is that, inexplicably, the person in front of me wearing *my* body is acting totally normal, as if he is *not* Yulia. And the second is . . . I look kinda *cute*. Not the Yulia body I’m wearing, I mean the me in front of me; Scott Palmer’s body - my body - looks oddly attractive. Oh God, it’s so wrong to even think like this, but I instantly feel a strange buzz of interest, right down to examining the way his chest hair creeps over the low collar of his pajama shirt, and how his face has an attractive stubble upon it. That’s my body! How can I be attracted to *myself*? This is a Narcissus complex on a whole new level!

“*Krasyvyy*,” I gasp. *Handsome*.

“Pardon?” the other me asked.

“N-nothing!” I say, pulling myself back to English even as I blush heavily. “Yulia, is that you?”

“Um, I’m sorry, I don’t really understand.”

“I mean, did you wake up feeling strange? Is there anything . . . odd about your body?”

The other me reacts exactly as I would. He slowly shakes his head, looking utterly confused but not wanting to end the conversation. And yet he just stands there, not really saying more, the darn introvert. It’s starting to send a chill down my spine. Could I have gotten this wrong? Oh God, could there be *two* Scott Palmers now?

“S-Scott?” I stammer.

“Yes, Yulia?”

Oh my, he’s head over heels for me. I’m head over heels for myself, and it goes the other way, too! Darn, this is tricky. “Scott, can I come into your apartment? There’s something very, very important we need to talk about, *tak*?”

He swallowed nervously, just as I would. "Can - can I just have fifteen minutes? I, er, haven't had a shower or breakfast . . ."

"*Tak*, fine! Just - just quickly! This is really important, you have no idea!"

He makes me a cup of coffee just as I would. He even lounges like I do, nervously tapping his knee as I speak to him. His eyes focus on mine, and then they break away when I meet his gaze, and it's so very uncanny. It makes me want to curse, and there are so, so very many colourful Ukrainian curses I can deliver with my new mother tongue. I had no idea Ukrainian swearing included so many pig's assholes, for one.

But he listens, that's the important thing. He listens as I explain how I woke up, as I tell him that I'm *him*, and that I have all of his memories, and that despite my accent and my voice and my very female and Slavic appearance, I should be *him*, with his short brown hair and cute hazel eyes (I don't tell him they are cute) and his slightly red nose. I always worried about my fitness, but from the outside I'm surprised at how normal I look, and certainly taller than my current form. And kind. There's nothing predatory about this other me; he is simply safe to be around. Is this Yulia's personality influencing me? Ugh, I have no idea!

Still, I ignore these utterly insane feelings of attraction to my own body and tell him everything. I know he will be sceptical, so I keep bringing up things that only he and I would know, being the same person. I talk about how we used to have a huge crush on Lisa Atwell back in primary school, the first girl we ever liked, and so we bought her flowers one day, not realising she had a massive allergy to pollen. I bring up that time we went to the cinema all alone to watch the re-screening of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, and how we were utterly unnerved by the performance of the actor playing Norman Bates, because it reminded us of how we often talked in a strange cadence while nervous. It played no small part in us moving out so we wouldn't be seen as a 'momma's boy.' I talk about celebrity crushes, and that one mole on our lower back that we keep getting worried about, despite the doctor clearing it as okay, and I mention something Yulia should not know, which is that when we first met her, we retreated back to our room and had a private little panic attack, because we were so scared we'd mucked it all up with our first impression. I talk about favourite childhood cartoons, how it was really us that broke Uncle Daryn's model sailing boat, a fact we've never told a soul after cousin Jerry got the blame. And last of all, I bring up the fact that, when no one is looking at work, we take the time for our own little software programming project; a little spacefarm simulator game set on Mars that we one day hope to actually be our ticket out of the boring office life, slaving away on company projects that hold no meaning to us.

When I finish, there is a long, protracted silence. I'm deeply aware of the way my breasts go up and down with each breath, and how my hair is starting to dry upon my neck. Everything about me feels so different, and I'm scared that this other Scott won't believe me, because where will that leave me? Where will that leave Yulia?

"You really are me," he says. "Aren't you?"

"*Tak!*" I declare, literally jumping to my feet in celebration, my broad smile flashing in that way only Yulia can pull off. "It's me! I'm you!"

But . . . I'm also me. You have all of my memories, but I have all of them too. What are you, a clone or something? Have you possessed Yulia somehow? What's happened to her?"

My smile dies just as quickly, and I let my shoulders sag. "I don't know," I say honestly. I pout a little, just like the real Yulia. "I don't understand why I woke up like this."

"And you're completely her? I mean . . . beneath?"

At this, I arch an eyebrow, then unzip my jacket and lift up my shirt, exposing my boobs in their bra. I let the shirt drop again and quickly zip my jacket back up.

"Is that proof enough for you?"

The other Scott gulps, and his cheeks turn bright red. I don't blame him. It's what I would do. Hell, it's literally what I'm doing right now, I guess, since he *is* me.

"That was . . . quite a display."

"Well, I'm not showing you anymore!"

"Oh, of course not! I'm sorry you ended up like this."

"Especially since we have such a huge crush on Yulia," I said, my accent going a little thicker in my despair.

"At least . . . at least that would have been quite fun, in a sort of way?"

I shake my head, sending my long blonde hair every which way. "You would think so, but no. I'm not . . . I don't find her attractive right now. At all, really."

"Wait, has the change altered your, er, orientation or something?"

"Yep. It's - oh, what the heck! I'll come out and say it. You're me, and it'll just be me and me getting embarrassed, right? I'm finding *you* very attractive! My own body!"

His eyes widen, and I can't blame him once more. He even points at himself. "M-me? But . . . you're me."

"*Tak! Did'ko*, this is humiliating. It's like I've taken on a lot of Yulia's personality, or something. Or at least her mannerisms, her language, and certainly some muscle memory. Her orientation as well."

"Does - does that mean the real Yulia was - is - into me? Into us, I guess?"

That takes me by surprise. In truth, I haven't considered that. What could a gorgeous fitness instructor like her, with all her confidence and optimism, see in a shy programmer like me who never had the nerve to ask her out?

"I have no idea," I answer honestly.

"That would be pretty wild, wouldn't it? Probably too crazy, really."

"As crazy as finding yourself in the body of your beautiful apartment neighbour?" I reply, gesturing to myself.

"Good point," the other Scott says. "Look, this is an intensely weird situation. You obviously have all my memories, so you must be me. I just don't know how this could happen."

"Maybe if we look around? There might be something here to explain it. We've both seen *The Prestige*, yeah? Some kind of duplicate scenario, perhaps? Or some experiment sent a copy of your - our - mind into this body?"

The other Scott nods. "Perhaps. I mean, has anything like this ever happened before? No, but you're right. We need to search the place. Uh, what should I call you?"

"Scott, obviously," I reply, despite my voice and Slavic accent.

"But I'm Scott."

"You - we're both Scott."

"That's confusing. If we were making this a line of code there would be disruptions, and you know it."

"Fine, just - just call me Yulia - just for now!"

"But you're not Yulia."

I groan and run my dainty fingers through my long strands of blonde hair. "Fine!" I declare. "You be Scott Prime, and I'll be Yulia Chalmers, how about that?"

He chuckles. "Like we're married."

"Oh God, there's no way the real Yulia is into you. I mean, into us. We're both far too pedantic. C'mon, let's just search the place."

We start doing so, tossing the rooms we are both so familiar with. Nothing comes up, and I start to grow desperate, checking under the mattress and behind the lights and even into the hole in the ceiling that the landlord has yet to repair, the one that leads to a strange crawlspace. Still nothing. I swear.

"What did that mean?"

"What?" I ask.

"You said something angry in Ukrainian."

I blush. Darn, I'm slipping back into my new mother tongue. "It means . . . a pile of pig excrement on your mother's corpse."

At this, Scott laughs. It's a lovely laugh. I never realised I had a lovely laugh until this moment. "Wow, you are really taking to this new body and culture thing, huh?"

"I definitely am not. How is there nothing here? Something has to explain this!"

"So . . . what's it like having boobs?"

I arch an eyebrow again.

"I'm just asking. We're allowed to be a bit bad with each other, right? I mean, we're the same person."

My annoying and utterly taboo attraction to him says otherwise. "We are not the same, because you still have your penis between your legs."

"Yeah, what's *that* like?"

"I've been ignoring it. Except when I have to pee . . . sitting down."

"And the boobs?"

At this, I can't help but sigh and unzip my jacket a little, looking down to see the cleavage at the top of my shirt collar. It is rather lovely cleavage, and I feel strangely warm at showing it off to myself. "They're . . . not actually that bad, at least in a bra. That took some doing."

"Do they jiggle much?"

"Hey, be respectful!"

Immediately, my other self - Scott Prime - clamps up. "I'm so sorry. Gosh, I don't know what came over me. Sorry, I figured that since you're you . . ."

"Yeah, well, just imagine me as being the real Yulia, and that will bring your - our - self-confidence issues right back to the fore, I'm sure."

There's a long extended pause as neither of us says anything. Scott Prime fidgets again in that damn cute way, and I can't help but smile a little at him, that same big flash of a smile that Yulia always did in my presence.

"I'm sorry this happened to you," Scott Prime says. "I shouldn't have been so insensitive."

"It's okay . . . I was curious, too. But I'm not turned on by the body. I thought I would be, but I've got her sexuality, now."

"And now you're looking at me like I'm . . . sorta attractive?"

I bite my lip and shrug. Funny thing about being Yulia is that I don't feel as nervous as I normally would be, but I'm still *pretty* nervous. "Y-yeah. It's pretty screwed up. Don't get any ideas."

He looks away. "Oh, I wouldn't . . . why, are you getting ideas?"

I stand up straight, my eyes wide. "I'm getting one right now."

"Wait, I wasn't really-"

“No, not that! I mean, why are we just checking our apartment? Why aren’t we also looking at Yulia’s apartment too? C’mon, *comrade!*”

At this, I actually flash a brilliant smile, and he chuckles again.

“Okay, you definitely have our goofy sense of humour.”

“And a nice body to go with it. Now let’s try and figure out what’s happened, and how I can get back in my old body without displacing you in yours!”

Of course, that would leave *two* Scott Palmers around to explain to the world, but I don’t think about that right now. Instead, we both march over to Yulia’s apartment, and I literally drag Scott Prime with me by the hand. It’s a rather firm hand. I never thought of myself as very muscular, but now I see I’m not exactly unfit, either. Certainly stronger than my new body, despite how fit Yulia’s is. But the handshake comes with an accidental cost: as we cross the hallway, old Mrs Weatherby is there making her way to the elevator. She smiles at us, and then claps a little.

“Oh, I always thought you two would get together! You must be feeling much better now, Yulia! Did you finally ask him out then? Oh, but you must have had great news from the doctor!”

I don’t know what to say to this, so I just sort of freeze. And because Scott Prime is pretty much me as well, he freezes too.

“I’m sorry,” Mrs Weatherby replies. “I shouldn’t pry. Just know that I’ve been praying for you, Yulia! God always finds a way to heal physically and spiritually! You treat her well, Scottie!”

She continues down the corridor and enters the elevator before either of us really know what to say, other than smile sheepishly. I look at Scott and gulp a little.

“She thinks we’re *dating!*?” I say.

“Uh, I guess so.”

“Well, that is *not* happening, even if this body finds you really cute, which is just totally insane, because it’s meant to be *my* body.”

I enter into Yulia’s apartment again, and Scott Prime follows me. “Hey,” he says. “A thought just occurred to me. “What if you’re into me because, well, the real Yulia really was into me? Us, I mean. Scott Chalmers.”

“That’s . . . not a bad theory. *Rohzoomnyh*. I mean, it sounds like she and Mrs Weatherby talked about you. Me. Both of us. Whatever. Oh my God, she had a crush on us the whole time? I could have been dating her!? Ughh . . . and now I’ve inherited her attraction to us. I guess she was into tall nerds or something?”

He shrugs. “She wouldn’t be the first. I mean, I always thought I looked a bit shabby.”

“No, you look sharp. Rather intelligent, too. And very kind eyes.”

Again, I realise that I'm checking Scott Prime out. Checking *myself* out. Which leads me to groan once more from the discomfort of it all. I go to rest my bang my head on the kitchen shelf, only to notice something; a stack of papers and half-opened letters.

"Hey, what's this . . ."

Scott Prime takes position behind me, looking over my shoulder. God, he's so much taller than me. I try not to focus on that - I guess Yulia was kinda a horny gal, huh? - and instead take in what I see before me.

"Those look like medical bills," Scott Prime says. "Big ones, too."

"Radiation treatment," I say, reading one of them and picking out some of the choice words. "Chemotherapy . . . blood cell work." A horrid epiphany dawns upon me as I read more, skimming over the doctor's letters, the printed emails, the bills, the notifications. Scott picks up a number of them too, but the picture all adds up.

"Good Lord," Scott Prime says. "She had some kind of cancer."

"Cancer in her blood," I correct, reading over one of the doctor's notes, from a man named Doctor Evan Militch. "And it looked like it was terminal. Heading from Stage 3 to Stage 4 with a fatal prognosis. *Layno!*"

Scott takes a step back and shakes his head. My heart trembles a little just to see him so wan all of a sudden. "No, no. That can't be. She's a fitness instructor! I mean, just look at you! You can't have blood cancer!"

I hold up my hands and turn them over. "I don't feel like I do, but who knows?"

"Maybe it's for her mom or something . . ."

A brief flash. I see Yulia's mother, a woman named Mariia. How do I even know this? I've never heard her name spoken before and only seen one or two photos of her briefly this morning, but now I see her clearly, back in Ukraine, on a family trip to Ukraine when I was a little girl and . . .

I shake my head, my thoughts sliding around the room like loose furniture during an earthquake. "*Nii*. It's not my Mama," I say, accent thicker again. "Her Mama, I mean. It's definitely her, this body. But I don't *feel* like I have cancer at all. I feel fitter and finer than I've ever been. I mean, the body is strange and I'm getting used to all these, er, curves, but it almost feels a little natural at times, like I'm adapting to it very quickly. I don't feel sick in the least."

"Perhaps she recovered."

"Perhaps," I say, though I'm not convinced. I focus, and once more I can feel those memories lurking beneath mine, as if I'm some kind of parasite, absorbing Yulia's memories, like she's lurking underneath me. God, I hope I'm not trapping her, leaving her as just a witness to this body's actions. Nevertheless, I uncover more memories.

The tears in my eyes as I am told I have cancer after numerous tests.

The commitment to remaining fit and keeping my job as an instructor between treatments.

The times I had to drop clients, and my decision not to tell them why.

Writing letters back home to my Mama and my Bat'ko, and being too scared to tell them the truth.

Seeing that cute guy across the apartment, the shy introverted nerd who nevertheless has such kind eyes and is always so considerate, who always asks me how I'm going but seems too nervous to ask me out. And now I won't be able to ask *him* out.

And now the worst memory; finding out that my prognosis is terminal. There is no getting out of it. I can barely support myself because the treatment is exhausting all of my money, and I cannot ask for more from my parents while they still live in Ukraine, which is under attack. I can only try to be my most optimistic self, all smiles and joy, and hide the tears as long as I can. I cut my fitness sessions down to the bone to those days when I'm not recovering from my treatment, knowing that it is only delaying the inevitable. What else is there to do but smile?

A final memory comes, a fragment. A small piece. It is so minuscule that it is barely a flash. There was a hope of something. Something desperate and ridiculous, and yet . . . she believed in it. / believed in it.

I wobbled a little on my feet, one hand on the side of my head as these memories hit me. "Scott, I . . ."

He catches me. God, I didn't feel like going to the gym was making a difference, but now as a woman, I can *feel* a big difference just from the way he holds me; the tension in his muscles is nice.

"Hey, are you okay? Do you need to sit down?"

His concern touches me, as do those kind eyes. I'm glad that Yulia saw something in me - in him - that I had never seen in myself. "It's okay," I say, touching his hand gently. "I'm getting some of her memories."

"Wait, you can do that?"

"*Tak*," I say. "Yes, I mean. I think this is far stranger. She had a strong hope of something, at the end. She was going to die, and that's why she was less available. And she very much had a crush on us - on you."

Scott adjusts his glasses nervously. Damn, he's attractive when he does that. I guess this body really does like tall nerdy guys. I shouldn't be surprised. I used to watch a lot of BBC drama shows, and they had wild female fandoms for those types. "Okay, wow. This is a lot to take in. And you . . . you're catching those feelings too?"

I smile in that sweet way Yulia does. "I guess so."

I have to bite my lip, and then I actually squeak. "Wait! I feel something! She - she did something *radical*. I think she *left* something for me."

"For you? Wait, she knew you were coming? Er, taking over her body?"

"*Tak. Nii*. Yes, no, I don't know! But she left something, I'm sure of it! She knew *something*, at least!"

I search throughout the apartment, but after twenty minutes we can't come up with anything. I even check the old TV with the VHS player, but there's no tape. I unlock her phone, remembering her code, and only find images and texts and selfies, all of which bring 'back' some memories, but none of which tell me what's going on.

That's when I remember a detail from this morning. When I woke up as Yulia, I was so surprised by the presence of my large breasts and female figure that I yelped and tossed the bedsheets to one side. The doona sent things on the bed sprawling, and then it *knocked everything off of the bedside table*.

I quickly run back to her bedroom and search in the space behind the bedside table against the backwall. "I can't reach!" I declare, but I can't move the damn thing. "It's too heavy."

"Allow me, Yulia Chalmers," Scott Prime says, and damn if it isn't *dashing* the way he says it. He shifts it aside with masculine ease, and once more I'm astonished by how introverted I am, because I really do look quite fit and attractive and, in this moment, attractively courteous. And yet Scott withdraws with a blush upon his cheeks, his eyes briefly scanning my obvious beauty. "Sorry, I hope that was okay."

"M-more than okay," I say. "Dude, please don't be embarrassed or shy in my presence."

"I know, you're really me."

I shake my head. *Nii*, not that. I mean . . . looking at you from the outside, you've got *nothing* to be shy about."

He blushed further, but smiles, and then I turn my attention back to the area behind the bedside table. Immediately I see that I was right: I knocked over what looks to be a cardboard message, as well as a videotape. A *VHS videotape*. I grab everything and put it in on the bed for Scott Prime to see.

"Holy moly," he says.

"*Tak*. Look at this. It's a big obvious sign that says 'Read Me' in Ukrainian *and* English. I was meant to see it but I must have knocked it away in my morning panic. And look, there's another card that just says, '*You're Going to be Okay*.'"

I kinda needed to hear that, actually. I take the card she's written and read it aloud, translating from the Ukrainian section more naturally, even though there's an English copy below.

"Don't be afraid. You may not have proper memories. I don't know anything about magic or rituals, but I believe that this will work. I'll be greatly changed, however, and I'm told that I won't be entirely myself, but something a little new. But I'll live, and I'll still have the love that I had in life, and the opportunities too. Do not worry, Yulia. You are still YOU. You are just a different kind of you. Someone who will be free of sickness. Someone who can LIVE. I am not afraid, because I know I am there with you, as part of you, but you will have part of someone else with you as well. The videotape will explain everything. Please watch it. They told me that other forms of recording will not work, so I had to do it old-style."

Scott Prime is already putting the tape into the player and turning on the TV. My heart is pounding. I'm almost afraid of getting answers. Who am I? Am I even Scott at all? I find myself having something approaching an existential crisis.

And then I'm on TV, after a brief pixelated blur. And by me I mean Yulia, the real her, with that radiant smile and those cutting cheekbones and those full lips and the eyes that light up brilliantly. She is sitting on her bed wearing her pyjamas, the ones I woke up in, though she must have removed her top overnight at some point, since I wasn't wearing *that* this morning.

"*Pryvit* and hello, New Yulia Shevchenko!" she says with an odd cheer. "I'm going to make this recording in English first, just in case, but I'll record another take in Ukrainian as well. I know you are confused and have lots of questions. I'm told that you might not remember everything, but that more of it will come to you in time, while some parts may be lost forever. Just know that everything is going to be okay, and I'm here from the past to explain it to you."

We both take a seat on the bed as she continues to talk. My hand finds Scott's, and he squeezes it gently, giving me comfort while my heart sits in my throat.

"My name - and your name - is Yulia Shevchenko. I'm a Ukrainian woman looking to get permanent residency in America, which is where *you* are. Specifically, in New York. I am only twenty seven years old. I love the food of my homeland, and I love going on walks, and I *adore* movies with very attractive actors! I also love going to the gym, which is where I work as a fitness instructor! I have my whole life ahead of me. At least, I *did* have my whole life, until I was diagnosed with a rare form of blood cancer that proved incurable. I hoped to get better, to become more financially secure and even ask a cute neighbour out - more on that in a moment - but instead I got worse and worse. In the end, my doctor told me I was going to die. He said it better, but that was the truth.

"Well, I've never been one to take life lying down. I want to live. I want to love. I'm getting tired of putting off everything I want to experience just because I'm still finding my feet and trying to adjust to a new country and new place. So I went hunting, and I found some people who were willing to help me. They . . . *nii*, how to explain this . . . they have

rituals. I guess you could say they have magic, but it's not like something out of *Harry Potter* - one of my favourite book series. It's something a lot . . . older. And you have to do it yourself. They gave me the information I needed to perform a ritual, and tonight I'm going to perform it, in order to save my life. Or at least, to save *most* of it.

"That's the thing about cancer, they tell me. To get rid of it through this ritual, I have to purge part of myself as well. I literally have to cut out some parts of my soul. And that means I need to sort of *copy* parts of someone else's soul as well. I need to stitch myself back together. There's a really cute guy - the one I mentioned before - who lives opposite you, Yulia. His name is Scott Chalmers, and he's exactly my type. He's tall and cute and has the most lovely kind eyes, and he talks to me often. Being a vulnerable woman in a new country, I'm wary of most men, but I've never felt threatened by him. He goes to the gym I work at, but I never felt like he was following me. Instead, he talks to me like a person first, even though I can tell he's attracted to me. In truth, I was going to ask him out before this news. I should have, anyway. Oh, and I forgot to mention, he's smart! A programmer, and he's making a game of some kind. I don't even know if he realises he let that slip once, because he got all embarrassed, but I thought it was very attractive. I like creative men, and perhaps you, the new me, will too.

So he's the one I admire, the one I like, and he was the one closest to me. Apparently proximity is important to the spell, not just physically to me but also the space I live and make my own. And as much as I love Mrs Weatherby, I feel like Scott is the one I want to have a piece of. I want to stress, I'm not stealing parts of his soul. The people I talked to were very clear about that. The process sort of 'copies' the parts I'm missing and places them into me. So I'll be a sort of union of Scott and myself, and who knows which part will be stronger? But I'll still be there, and the parts will become more naturally together over time, until they are neither Scott's nor mine, but instead all of our soul is something . . . new."

Tears appear in her eyes, but she still smiles so radiantly.

"And I think that's rather beautiful. This is what I wanted to tell you, that you are beautiful and new, and you should get up to speed and ask that cute man out as soon as your head is in the right space, because I'm tired of putting things off because I'm new, or adjusting, or sick, or dying. Be the best version of me I can be, Yulia, and if part of you is a little more boyish now, that will be wonderful too. Mama always said she thought I was going to be a boy!"

She giggles for a moment, and wipes away another tear. "Now, this is the boring bit. Information about my life and bank details and all that. You can pause here if you-"

Scott pauses the video. It's a good thing too, because I'm practically hyperventilating. It's as if my entire universe has been pulled out from under me like a cheap rug, and I'm falling backwards into nothingness.

"I'm not . . . me," I manage to say. Tears are welling up in my eyes as I say it. "I'm not anybody."

Scott - not Scott Prime, just *Scott* - hesitates, but only for a moment. Then he's at my side, and I'm pressing my face into his chest as the tears come. Very slowly, still tinged with that same nervousness and yet growing more confident by the second, his arms encircle me, and I feel much more protected. Safe, even.

"You are someone," he says in that kind, compassionate voice of his.

"I thought I was you. But - but those memories are just stolen."

"Not stolen, copied. And from the sounds of things, they're slipping more into place now. Do you remember much about being Yulia?"

I close my eyes and focus, still pressing my body against his. The memories do draw forth. They're not entirely complete, but I remember my fear back in 2022 when the Russians invaded across the border. I remember my parents taking me out to my uncle's farm when I was only six, and how I loved the sheep especially. I remember learning to dance, and then finding real joy in maintaining my fitness. I remember hugging my parents as I said goodbye to them.

But the memories aren't entirely hers, because I have the other memories as well. Scott's memories. Those aren't fully complete either, and I feel as if I'm only just now realising that. I don't recall everything, and I feel as if some of his science-fiction isn't really for me, not nearly so much as Yulia's romance dramas. It's like two people have been welded together through magic, and I'm the result.

"I remember more, but I still remember being Scott. But it's like I've got her smile, her mannerisms, her - her *sexuality*. And I feel more of her emotions too. They're powerful, but they're not as . . . shy, I guess? But I'm shyer than her in some ways. She really did take parts of me. No, parts of *you*, to heal herself."

"Not take, copy."

"It's the same thing."

Scott shakes his head. "Not to me."

"She - I - did this to you without your consent! Without you even knowing!"

"She was dying. She was alone, and she would have looked crazy if she came to me, and then it probably wouldn't have even worked, Yulia. I think she knew it was the only way, and that I wouldn't be harmed. I'm not angry at her. I'm not even frustrated. Strange as it may sound, I'm - I'm kind of *honoured*."

I swallow. There's so many emotions. A whole tapestry of memories weaving together in my mind. Male *and* female.

"This is confusing," I say as I clutch my head and then press it against him just a little longer.

"I can't imagine."

"I'm still not anybody. I'm just two halves."

"But you *are* somebody, remember? You may be new, but you are still somebody. You're Yulia Chalmers, just like we agreed."

It's enough to make me stop and actually giggle a little. I can't help but flash that radiant smile as I look up at him. "I like that name," I say. "Do you mind if I use it . . . not professionally, I'd have to be Yulia Shevchenko, but just between you and me?"

He blushes, and I realise the implication of my words. Yulia Chalmers would sound like his *wife*. Somehow, that doesn't seem like the worst prospect to me. Not at all. I have part of his soul in me, and isn't that sort of a marriage already? It's what all the celebrants and priests talk about, just . . . more literal than they perhaps imagine.

"I'd be honoured," he says, and that smile makes me grin all the more. I realise that we're still holding one another, but the truth is I don't want to let go. I'm still grappling with the fact that I'm actually Yulia, but a new version of her, one who has to rather adjust to being female, despite the fact that I've technically always been one.

"So . . . what happens now?" he asks. "I mean, do you need help? I have to imagine this is so much to take in."

It is. God, it is. I don't even know where to start. But here, held in his arms, I also feel like I'm going to be okay. I'm a new me. I'm both Scott and Yulia, and perhaps with time I'll be fully comfortable with that. A totally new woman, and a very attractive one at that. I'm distinctly aware of how much my breasts are pressed up against him, as a matter of fact. It's a nice feeling, and that too gives me hope. Slowly, I raise my hand and caress his cheek, daring to bring in more of that part of myself who is Yulia.

"It *is* a lot to take in," I say in my Ukrainian accent, one that is still strange to me, but not unappealing either. "But I think . . . I think I can learn to be okay."

His cheeks are so warm that it makes me giggle. "That's great. Jeez Louise, what a morning, huh? Do you need some privacy?"

I nod. "*Tak*, just a little. But maybe we could, er, catch up later today? Talk about this more? I don't want to be alone, and it's both parts of me that feel this way."

"Of course! Yes, I'd love to, Yulia *Chalmers*. We could grab a bite to eat? Get out of the apartment, try to help you adjust?"

Another smile, even bigger than before. I just can't help myself. He's still holding me, and now I'm holding him.

"It's a date," I say.

The End