

Sample Translation by Translator Rachel Reynolds

## Chapter 1

In which Ginger wants to climb high,  
but a black-and-white bird arrives, bringing loneliness

“Come on, Ginger, a little higher!”

“It’s worth the climb, I promise!”

Ginger gazed up.

However, she could hardly see anything through the dense, rustling leaves that surrounded her on all sides. The only thing she could make out was the fuzzy outlines of two people, high up in the crown of the tree. A man and a woman. Her father and mother. She could tell that they were smiling by the sound of their voices. Happy because of the spring day whose mild breeze filled every breath they took with the scent of flowers. Happy because of the birdsong around them, the humming and buzzing of the insects, and the rustling of the leaves, which produced a concert that tickled their ears. And simply unbelievably happy that they had each other and Ginger.

“I don’t think I can make it!” Ginger exclaimed, despite all this.

“Oh, come on! It’ll be a piece of cake for you!”

“Just believe in yourself, big girl.”

“All right,” Ginger whispered. “I’ll do it. Of course, I will!”

She took a deep breath and reached for the branch above her head with both hands. Slowly she pulled herself up, using one foot for leverage against a thicker branch. Then with a little swing, she...

“Did you make it?” her father’s voice rang out.

“I made it!” Ginger called as the sunbeams shone down on her through the foliage, causing bright spots to dance across her arms and legs.

“Now for the next stretch. The view is amazing!” her mother declared encouragingly.

“No wonder. It’s so far up there!” Ginger could feel her voice tremble.

Her father laughed. “Since when are you scared of heights?”

“I’m never scared!”

Onward and upward. Reach up, plant your foot firmly... Crap! Slipped. Don’t stop now though. Little by little, Ginger inched her way upward. Strangely enough, though, her parents never seemed to get any closer! The two remained blurry and indistinct. Suddenly Ginger hesitated. There... a shadow passed over her. Something black. Something white. And a red glow! Ginger recognized the silhouette of a bird. A crow.

“Hey, who are you?” Ginger asked, clicking her tongue beckoningly.

But what kind of strange light was glowing now? If she wanted to find out, Ginger had to keep moving upward. However, before she could wrap her fingers around the next branch, the crow made a soft squawking sound. It sounded eerie, like a rattle. Almost like a metallic laugh. And then Ginger caught sight of the bird’s eyes above her head! Pitch black – and yet lackluster at the same time. As if the animal couldn’t see Ginger all that clearly.

It gave her goosebumps. “What do you want?”

At that moment, the crow flew off into the thicket with a few ponderous flaps of its wings.

“Ginger! Quickly!! You have to...”

That was her father, but something had changed. The buoyancy had vanished from his voice. He suddenly sounded upset. To be honest, he actually sounded panicked! Before he could finish his sentence, he was interrupted by a clattering screech. And then: more feathery fluttering. Leaves swirled through the air. And a white feather danced down from the sky, like an oversized snowflake.

“Ginger! You have to get down! Hide! Something’s wrong up here!” Her mother’s voice was now fearful as well.

Ginger froze.

“Mama? Papa? What’s going on?”

No reply.

Ginger hurriedly reached for the next branch, but her hands were trembling from fear. She almost slipped.

“Papaaaa! Mamaaaaa! Where are you? Wait for me. Please!”

But Ginger’s voice and her own echo were the only things there.

Mamaaaaa?

Mamaaaaa?

Mamaaaa.

Mam.

Mam.

A.

A.

And finally:

Nothing.

Silence.

Even the echoes off the trees around her fell mute, refusing to provide Ginger with an answer.

“Mama! Papa! Please don’t leave me!”

Ginger kept climbing, without looking down even once. She ignored the bark of the tree as it rubbed her hands raw. And the manic beating of her heart, which sounded like a thunderstorm pounding in her ears.

“Mamaaaa! Papaaaa!”

Ginger didn’t even register that the strength in her arms had long since ebbed away. However, she did realize that she was alone. Completely alone. All of the birds had fallen silent, and she couldn’t hear even one insect. The only sound was the quiet rustling of the leaves, as if the tree wished to speak soothingly to her through its greenery.

*Don’t be scared, Ginger.*

*We’ll take care of you.*

And then – she slipped. She screamed. And she fell. And fell.

She waited on the hard, painful impact.

But – it didn’t come! Instead, something brushed against her arm and softly stopped her fall. It was a branch with its leaves and tendrils. At first, it wrapped itself around her wrist, and then more and more little twigs and leaves sprouted out of it. Ginger felt a tingling shiver spread

across her skin as the leaves enveloped her entire arm, until the tree wrapped her up like a cocoon.

“Don’t be afraid. Shhhh. Don’t be afraid,” the leaves seemed to whisper once more, as weariness enfolded her like an invisible blanket. Warm and hidden, Ginger lay curled up at the center of it, and her heart immediately began to slow down.

[...]

### Chapter 3

#### In which a mysterious encounter takes place

As Ginger stepped out of the room, she almost stumbled over the strange robotic vacuum cleaner, which spent the entire day making rounds throughout the house, flashing a little red light in front of it. As if it were an eye that was blinking at Ginger. She hesitated. A red glow, red like in her dream. Was that what had caused her dream?

Had the vacuum cleaner followed her into her dreams?

“You’re annoying!” Ginger shoved the machine aside roughly with the tip of her foot.

On the other hand, the Dorns coddled the machine the same way other families indulged a dog or a cat. It didn’t have any scratches on it. Its plastic shell glittered, and the dust filter was cleaned multiple times a day. And apparently it was kept at a full charge. Only for its own good. What else?

Indeed, it seemed to her, absurdly enough, as if the machine was following her! And just like the clattering of the air conditioning, the robot’s continuous whirring gave her a headache. As Ginger moved toward the kitchen, down the snowy white tiled hallway, the vacuum cleaner once again trailed her, close on her heels. And she could have sworn that it lurked outside her door at night. Ginger sped up and shut the door just inches from the device. At the last second. The machine slammed into it with a whirr and a rattle.

Fresh rolls, jam, and tea were spread across the table. Ginger’s stomach rumbled, whether she wanted it to or not. At the same time, her eyes fell on the wall calendar hanging across from her.

A red plastic marker indicated today’s date: May 12.

There was something about that day. However, like all the other times she desperately tried to recall her life, she was confronted with nothing except heavy, milky fog. And because any attempt to penetrate this fog only made her head ache more, she just let the matter drop.

“What are you waiting for?” Mrs. Dorn jolted her out of her thoughts. “Sit down.”

Mr. Dorn set his newspaper aside with a crinkle.

“Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.”

He was wearing a shirt and tie. A pale beige shirt with a dark beige tie! What else would he have on? According to the calendar, it was Sunday, which meant there wasn't anywhere he had to be that would require the wearing of a tie.

“We're doing everything we can to help you feel better, so that you'll feel at home here,” Mrs. Dorn declared reassuringly.

The word *home* was enough to make Ginger abandon her efforts at good will. “This isn't my home! My home is with my parents! But until someone actually tries to search for them in that crappy jungle, I won't be able to go home again.”

Wherever that might be, Ginger added silently to herself.

Once again, an awkward silence was the only reply. The robotic vacuum cleaner, which had somehow found its way into the room, rammed against a chair leg and changed course.

“They aren't dead. They're alive. I just know it”

Yet that wasn't quite true. Ginger knew absolutely nothing, but she hoped it was true. It just had to be true, had to be! And regardless of what had happened to her parents, she would never ever stay here and let herself be locked up even one second longer.

“Well, uh, Ginny, I mean, Ginger,” Mr. Dorn cleared his throat sheepishly. “Go ahead and eat something!”

And because she could no longer suppress the hungry grumbling in her stomach, despite her fury, she choked down the next bitter comments and helped herself. She had to keep her feelings under better control. Not for the Dorns' sake. For the sake of her own freedom!

“May I go out?” Ginger asked after she had obediently put her empty plate in the dishwasher.

As casually as possible. As cordially as possible.

“In the yard? Of course!” Mrs. Dorn tried to smile again, but it looked as if she had a slice of lemon on her tongue. “You know, a few minutes a day. That's fine.”

“I mean *really* out! Into nature. A walk in the woods. Or to some lake!”

At this, Mrs. Dorn's eyes grew alarmingly large. Her husband inhaled with a whistle and reached for his wife's hand in order to squeeze it firmly.

“You know how dangerous that is!” he said.

“No! I don't know! I don't know anything anymore! Maybe... Maybe it's just a

misunderstanding. Maybe someone in the hospital mixed up the files!” Ginger shook her head. “My parents never would’ve taken me on a trip to a jungle if I was allergic to all the plants in world! And besides, this place is like a prison!”

It was so quiet that the noise of the vacuum cleaner sounded like the rumble of thunder.

“How can you say that?” Mr. Dorn asked.

His wife had turned rigid.

“Go. To. Your. Room!” she finally wheezed out slowly, word for word, as if each were a dumbbell that she had to wrestle up off the floor with great effort.

“But I...” Ginger began.

“Go,” Mr. Dorn urged as well.

However, Ginger didn’t slink out of the room. She could feel her heart thudding loudly in her ears. If only the two of them had taken in a well-oiled robot girl, into this prison of white tiles in which not even a puny house plant was allowed to live, because with all its pollen, soil clumps and everything else, it would’ve been deemed too *dangerous*.

Ginger glared at the beige-colored couple. Then all of a sudden, a... creature appeared.

Was it a butterfly? Or a small bird? It didn’t have a beak, but had fur instead. Bright fur. Its head was turquoise, while the rest of its tiny body shimmered emerald green. And it had pointed ears. Or did it? Ginger couldn’t say exactly because the little animal was swift, and it flew off over her head with a flutter of wings. Ginger’s jaw dropped, as the Dorns waved their arms wildly. She had never seen the two of them so agitated. Ginger almost had to laugh. If only the life of the little visitor weren’t in danger!

“Psst! Get out of here!” cried Mr. Dorn. “Get lost!” With his rolled-up newspaper, he swung at the creature.

What was it anyway? It looked like a cross between a bat and a butterfly. Such animals didn’t exist! At the same time, though, Ginger felt as if she had seen this creature before.

But she didn’t have time to dig up this buried memory. After Mr. Dorn missed with his newspaper, his wife reached for a frying pan. The flutterer was only just able to dart away sharply from her blow.

“Are you crazy?” shouted Ginger.

“How did that bird get in here?” Mrs. Dorn asked without paying the least attention to

Ginger.

“That isn’t a bird! It’s nothing but a pesky insect!” Mr. Dorn cried.

“Just leave it alone, the poor, tiny thing!” Ginger yelled.

By this point, the fanciful creature had come to rest on top of one of the kitchen cabinets. Mr. Dorn was already in the process of climbing up on a chair, which spurred the animal to take flight again. It quickly picked another perch, this time on Ginger’s shoulder.

“Girl! Get rid of that! Right now!” Mrs. Dorn cried out.

“But the animal isn’t hurting anything!”

The creature on Ginger’s shoulder was actually purring like a kitten.

Ginger felt nothing that resembled an allergic reaction. Quite the opposite. This was doing her good, for the first time since she had woken up here. She felt a pleasant tingling deep inside, as warmth radiated from the animal’s little feet throughout her body. Little feet with the tiniest of toes.

“Hey, you,” Ginger whispered.

She suddenly no longer felt as if the creature were strange. Rather, it was just nice and fluffy. And once again, she was struck with the feeling that this wasn’t the first time she had seen it. It was more than that, though. It was as if she were meeting a good friend after a long time of being apart.

And then something happened. Ginger’s fingertips started to tingle, and suddenly she had an image in her mind. She was in a meadow of flowers, next to a thick tree trunk. And this little creature was buzzing around her ears.

“Gotcha!” Mr. Dorn shouted. He had thrown a handkerchief over the animal, snatched it up, and was running with it toward the door. This happened so quickly that all Ginger could do was stare numbly as he did this.

“Hey! Let Fido go! Right now!” Ginger shouted.

She hesitated. Fido. The name had just suddenly materialized, out of thin air.

Mr. and Mrs. Dorn also paused and stared at her, as if she had said something strictly forbidden.

Ginger tried to take advantage of the moment and reached Mr. Dorn in one large stride. But Mrs. Dorn was faster. She grabbed Ginger’s arm, pretty roughly at that.

“The bird must go, for your health alone,” she said quite calmly in a lulling singsong tone.

“That isn’t a bird. It isn’t just a thing, either. It’s...”

As suddenly as the name had come to her, it slipped out of Ginger’s mind.

“Of course, it’s a bird,” Mrs. Dorn insisted. “A totally normal parakeet. And now the poor thing can return to its friends,” she continued. She spoke to Ginger as if she were a little child, much too slowly and at least one octave too high.

At that moment, something brushed against Ginger’s feet. The robotic vacuum cleaner! It buzzed, rattled and flashed its lights. Ginger’s headache began to pound in rhythm with the blinding, red light on that strange, artificial robotic eye.

“Go to bed, girl. Get some rest.” Mrs. Dorn put an arm around her.

“Just a parakeet... of course,” Ginger mumbled as her eyes grew heavy.

What else could it have been?

There were no such things as colorful butterfly-bats that purred like kittens.

## Chapter 4

### In which Ginger finds a friend and the sky returns a memory to her

When she woke up, Ginger felt like it all had to be some crazy dream. Nonetheless, it seemed as if she could still feel the strange creature’s little feet on her. She glanced at her shoulder. A tiny amount of emerald green fluff was still clinging to her shirt! Ginger touched it with her fingertip and watched as shimmering strands swayed as she exhaled.

The little animal really had been here!

And Ginger once again recalled its name. Fido! She could only hope that Mr. Dorn actually had set him free. But how did Ginger know him? And why had the Dorns gotten so upset at the sight of him? Certainly not because of a non-existent allergy. That was obvious. Something was wrong here, and Ginger urgently needed to think things through in peace. And in the fresh air at that! This awful house wasn’t just a prison for her body, but also for her thoughts. Ginger listened intently, holding her breath. Muffled voices came from the Dorns’ bedroom. It sounded as if they were talking with someone on the phone.

“Unfortunate incident,” she heard. “An intruder. Urgent action needed. Have to change the plan.”

Ginger’s heart skipped a beat. Action needed? What if the Dorns tried to prevent her from accessing her memories and her past? Wouldn’t that mean that they’d had something to do with her parents’ disappearance? What if that helicopter crash had never happened?

She had to get out of here. Right now! Could she have overlooked some window?

She tried the kitchen, the living room, the bathroom. The only ones she couldn’t check were those in the bedroom in which the Dorns were still concealed. The last place she inspected was the storage room. However, not even a tiny beam of daylight penetrated this space. And yet, Ginger hesitated. Something was keeping her here between the narrow walls with their ceiling-height shelves. A hunch, a vague feeling, and a slight tingling in her fingertips! She studied the contents of the shelves more closely. Canning jars. Household cleaners, thousands of varieties, and boxes of noodles and rice.

All of a sudden, Ginger heard a rustling, a very soft sound. It came from overhead!

“Oh! You poor thing!”

She pushed a box off of the shelf, climbed up, and stood up on her tiptoes. This was how she was just barely able to reach a withered house plant. The leaves were more gray than brown and completely brittle. Like ancient, wrinkled paper.

“How could someone do this? Just leave you in the dark and let you die of thirst?”

Ginger lowered herself to the floor between the shelves. She cradled the flowerpot firmly between her knees and softly stroked the leaves, which practically turned to dust between her fingers.

The tingling in her fingertips grew stronger, and she could hear the quiet rustling once more. It sounded like a whisper. A friendly here-you-are-again.

Like in her dream in which the branches of the tree had held her tightly.

But this plant was dead! Completely dried out. Or... had it just moved? At that moment, she heard a knocking.

“Crud!” Ginger hissed as she tried to hide the plant behind her back.

But then she realized that the Dorns weren’t standing at the door. The knocking was coming from somewhere else. From somewhere behind her in the wood-paneled wall.

Ginger carefully set the plant down next to her. “I’ll be right back,” she whispered.

She stood up and pressed her ear against the wood. Obviously somebody was knocking! Who was it? That small fluffy butterfly-bird? Had he found a way to get back in to show Ginger the way to get out?

“Wait! I’m coming!”

Inch by inch, she felt her way along the boards. She knocked, pressed and tugged until she found a loose board. Ginger shook it firmly and managed to loosen it. Behind it was a windowpane. Ginger bit back a shout of joy. One more board below it. Then the next one. And one last one! And now she actually had a small window in front of her. Ginger pulled on the handle, and the window opened.

She stuck her head out first. The sun! It was hanging up there, beaming so brightly that Ginger had to squint to get used to the light. And that amazingly blue sky! And far off in the distance, a veil floated in the air. A gray mist as if a storm were advancing her way.

The small emerald green animal was nowhere to be seen, however. All Ginger could see was one normal butterfly. A peacock butterfly, that was hovering above the edge of the gutter with slow beats of its wings. It was probably starving because down in the garden there wasn't one single flower to feed on.

Hopefully nothing had happened to the fluffy bird! And if he hadn't been the one knocking, then who had it been? The wind? But hardly a breeze was stirring outside. "It doesn't matter. The main thing is that we're outside!" With these words, Ginger pushed all the unanswered questions away from her. "Pay attention, my dear. Now you will finally get to see something of the world again," she whispered to the plant before clutching it under her arm and climbing out of the window.

Ginger took a deep breath. This air! It smelled a little like rain, like a mixture of damp leaves and moist dirt. Holding the plant firmly in both hands, Ginger carefully sat down on the roof tiles. It was good that she was still barefoot, so that she could grip them better. Besides, it was so nice to feel chilly! It felt so... alive. The exact opposite of padding around on the cold, clean tiles.

She instantly felt much better being outside, and her mind was much clearer. Ginger glanced up at the blue sky above the rooftops once more. In the distance, she caught sight of green hills on the edge of the city. A thousand different shades of green. This was the time of year that the trees were first leafing out, and they looked so marvelous, all standing together. It almost looked unreal, like a huge, painted canvas on the horizon.

"Isn't it beautiful?" Ginger asked the plant, and it sounded to her as if her companion rustled its leaves softly in agreement.

Ginger closed her eyes, listening to the twitter of birds around her and enjoying the way the sunbeams warmed the tip of her nose, and – another memory resurfaced! The tree trunk once more. And that fluttering animal once more. Fido! And her parents. This time, Ginger could see their faces right in front of her. Her mother's warm smile – the freckles on her nose seemed to dance whenever she was really happy. The sea-blue eyes of her father and the numerous wrinkles around their corners. Laugh lines. Ginger could see, at almost any given moment, how happy they were to have her. And how proud they were of her! How could Ginger have forgotten

that? Tears trickled down her cheeks.

“Mama, Papa, where are you?” she whispered.

Before Ginger could submerge herself deeper in the memory, she heard a quiet rustling. It was the plant again. Its leaves had by now taken on their real color, and they didn’t look as wrinkled anymore.

“That’s amazing! I’ll give you some water inside right away, okay? Who knows? Perhaps you’ll get better again!”

Although, of course, Ginger had absolutely no desire to go back inside her prison. She desperately needed an escape plan!

At that moment, a dull thud sounded next to her. With a yelp, Ginger flinched back. Something fluffy had landed right at her feet.

No, it wasn’t the colorful, fluffy, fluttery bird. It had red fur and a long, bushy tail. Ginger couldn’t help but chuckle.

“You’re a squirrel. Just a boring old squirrel!”

The squirrel wrinkled its nose and snapped its tail back and forth. It looked downright indignant. So indignant that Ginger had to laugh once more. That felt so good! However, one moment later, she practically choked on her laughter.

“Boring? I’m a pretty outstanding specimen, thank you very much!” the squirrel replied huffily, rather angrily propping its hands on its waist. However, a second later it was smiling again. “Boy, Ginger. You’re really here! I’m so glad to see you in one piece. Do you have any idea how worried we’ve all been about you? Now we just need to find Fido – and then get away from here as fast as we can!”