# MOVIES SHOWING NOWHERE

Translated from the Dutch
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PUSHKIN CHILDREN'S

# CATE

Cate was twelve when her dad told her it was about time she grew up. He didn't say anything to her very often, so the fact that he was speaking to her at all was quite remarkable. It was a shame, though, that he chose such a silly thing to say. Cate was still a child, and there was no reason for her to grow up for a long time yet. And in any case, she'd never want to grow up to be like he was.

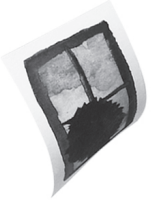
Pretty much all her dad did was disappear off into his own little world. He stared at the TV in his own little world, at the wall in his own little world, at the window in his own little world. Early in the morning, he got out of bed, grabbed himself a cup of coffee and gazed outside for about half an hour. All in his own little world. Cate was convinced that he saw absolutely nothing of the view from the window. Not the trails slowly fanning out behind the aeroplanes and into the blue, not the woman twirling down the street like a ballerina behind her dogs. His expression was empty, and when his coffee

mug was empty too, he usually walked out of the door without saying anything and headed off to work. If that was what it meant to be a grown-up, Cate had decided, then she was *never* going to be one. Not even when she actually did grow up.

Cate was now staring out of the window herself. Not in her own little world – although she did have a cup of coffee and a head full of thoughts.

She saw Cornelia walking up the garden path. With a bucket full of cleaning products in one hand, a mop and spray can in the other, and a sour look on her face, as if she could already smell the dirt inside the house, even from outside. Cornelia was just a neighbour, but sometimes she acted like she thought she was Cate's mum.

But no one was Cate's mum. At least, no one who was alive.



# THE FLOATY RED SUMMER DRESS

As Cate came into the world, her mum left it. She had been dead, almost to the exact minute, for as long as Cate had been alive. All Cate knew about her were the few things her dad had told her. She had only one photo of her. And a dress.

That photo was one of Cate and her mum together. Her mum on a bench in the grass in the sunshine. In a floaty red summer dress, with a great big smile on her face. Cate inside her mum's belly, probably without a smile, because she was clearly still far too little and clueless for that. The photo was from a few weeks before her birth, a few weeks before her mum's death.

And the dress she had was the one her mum was wearing in the photo. It hung in a separate corner of Cate's wardrobe and every morning, when she opened the wardrobe door, she looked at it for a moment. Other than Cate herself, those two things were the

only evidence in the whole house that her mum had ever existed.

Although Cate was far from grown up, she was old enough to have a bruised heart. Firstly, because she felt guilty. Obviously she hadn't done it on purpose, but the facts were simple: if Cate hadn't been born, her mum would still be alive. Cate sometimes spent an hour at a time looking at herself in the mirror, wondering what to make of the girl reflected there. Sometimes she felt disgusted and angry with herself. Sometimes she felt mad at everyone and everything – at the entire world. Because it was a world in which Cate and her mum could not both exist. Cate didn't really believe that there was someone, somewhere behind the scenes, meanly cackling away, but it did feel as if the world had been unkind. As if ever since the moment she was born, reality had decided to be her enemy.

And sometimes – this was happening more and more often in recent years – she simply felt nothing. It was as if her mum were fading away more and more as time passed, and as if Cate cared less and less. And that was what made her feel worst.

The front door opened and Cate gave a little shiver. Partly because of the coffee, partly because of Cornelia's sickly sweet perfume, which was seeping into the kitchen. And maybe just a little bit because of her mum.

# A RECIPE FOR CALM

Take a perfectly level teaspoon of rat poison. *Perfectly* level – so don't just use your eyes. Use a magnifying glass. It's very important to be precise when precision is what's required. Recipes have to follow the recipe exactly, and rules have to follow the rules exactly. So, a *perfectly* level teaspoon of rat poison. Then half a cup of household vinegar – again, perfectly precise. Fifty grams of fishbones, but only those really hard ones that get stuck in your throat. A full bottle of caustic soda, two scouring pads and finally ten of those tiny little poisonous apples. Boil everything down in a big pan until the house is filled with green, yellow and brown fumes and – ta-da! – that's master chef Cate's authentic recipe to make: one Cornelia.

Cornelia came round a few times a week to do the cleaning. She was paid to do that, but she wasn't paid to stick her nose into everything. She did that for free. And, if you asked Cate, she stuck her nose into every single

little thing, particularly anything that was nothing to do with her. For instance, the mess in Cate's room, which Cate thought made it cosy – and she could always find exactly what she was looking for. But Cornelia said it was a pigsty where you couldn't find anything except for mouldy bits of pizza. And even though Cate had very often – and very forcefully – made it clear to Cornelia that she should keep her hands off her things, she still regularly found her room in a spotless condition when she got home from school, with everything tidied away into cupboards and drawers, folded, stacked and sorted.

As Cornelia's heels came tip-tapping into the kitchen, Cate took an extra-big gulp of coffee and struggled to swallow it. She didn't even like coffee. But she drank it anyway because Cornelia had said it was bad for her.

'Coffee and sweet things and fizzy drinks. They're all poison to your body, my dear,' her sugary voice echoed in Cate's head. 'All they'll do is feed more of your angry outbursts.'

Angry outbursts that Cate didn't have. Okay, maybe very occasionally with Cornelia, but even a sloth would lose its cool with her.

'We just have to find a place for your anger,' Cornelia always said. 'Put it in a little place in a tiny little hole inside your head and then neatly pop the lid back on.'

That was Cornelia's solution for everything that was a bit painful or awkward, for all the things she interfered

in without being asked to: put it in the hole. Close your eyes, hide it away, pretend it's not there.

It always made Cate furious.

She shivered again, grabbed her backpack off the kitchen table and walked straight past Cornelia to the front door. As Cate passed, Cornelia shook her head and sniffed, with her nose in the air.

'I can smell coffee again, my dear.'

# MUSIC FROM THE PAST

The weather wasn't at all cold yet. Autumn had only just begun. They were in the weeks of fiery red and deep orange and bright yellow, the weeks when the sun makes the earth glow, the weeks just before the world becomes still. Of all the seasons, Cate loved autumn best. It was the season when everything had more meaning. Everything that had once been, everything that was yet to come. And everything that was *now* too, everything already passing before your eyes. Autumn had a sadness that she wanted to plunge into. She'd searched the internet for a word to go with that feeling. And when she found it, it turned out to be a beautiful one: melancholy.

Cate rode her bike to the field-that-didn't-exist, on the other side of the village. She went there almost every day. She propped her bike against a tree and lay in the grass in the middle of the field, leaning back on her elbows. Then she picked a blade of grass, popped it into the corner of her mouth and looked at the street,

watching the morning passing by: a man with a shopping bag, a woman on the phone, some cars and bikes, the first falling leaves.

The field-that-didn't-exist obviously *did* exist, or Cate wouldn't have been able to lie down in it. But no one except for Cate seemed to see it. Everyone saw the spectacular house to the left of the field. With its bright red window and door frames and its blue walls, it looked like something straight from the future. And everyone saw the even more spectacular house to the right, with turrets sticking out of the wall like rockets. But the field-that-didn't-exist, right in between those incredible houses, stubbornly escaped everyone's notice.

Except Cate's. She had trained herself to 'look sideways', as she called it. That meant not looking at the things that automatically drew your attention, but at what was right beside them instead. She had discovered an entire world there, hiding in plain sight.

Cate always carried her camera with her so she could capture those unseen things. She never took photos of people looking thoughtful or of impressive buildings or romantic sunsets or dramatic skies. She only took photos of things that were so insignificant and unremarkable that no one else saw them. That *really, absolutely* no one else saw, as if they weren't there. Like the field-that-didn't-exist. Her computer was full of photos of front gardens, fences, nooks and crannies, statues and door

handles. Objects that existed, but who for? Who would notice if they weren't there? And if there was no one to notice them, were they really there? Maybe not – that was what Cate thought. Maybe they only became real when she pointed the lens of her camera at them. She thought that was an incredibly amazing idea.

It was the first Sunday of the autumn holidays. The bustle of Saturday was over and there was a strange stillness in the air, as if the sky were so big that all the sound had got lost in it.

The sun felt warm on Cate's face. And with that warmth, out of nowhere, her mum suddenly came back into her mind. Cate was always startled by the unexpected way she turned up. That was happening less and less, but it was the second time this morning. And although this was one thought she barely dared to even think, she really didn't want to spend the morning thinking about her mum.

Cate spat out the blade of grass, opened her backpack and took out a big bottle of fizzy pop and a stack of comics.

Then she sat up so that the sunlight fell exactly on the top of her head and she felt goosebumps spreading from there and down her back and arms until her toes were tingling. As if her feet were touching the ice-cold waves of a vast ocean. A smile crossed her face. She took one

of the comics from the pile (*Zombie Apocalypse II: The Slaughter of the Baby Zombie King*) and started reading.

But just as she started to sink into her comic, she was gripped by the feeling that someone was watching her. The field-that-didn't-exist was deserted, but it didn't feel that way. Cate was sure that, the moment she looked up from her comic, she would see someone standing there. But when she did look up, she saw no one.

Cate stood up, spun around in a circle and ran her eyes over the bushes. Then she shook her head. It must have been her imagination. Cornelia would have said she'd had too much stimulation, and that could cause all manner of inconvenient 'commotions' (that was what Cornelia called emotions that she disapproved of because they were 'bad for you'). And, of course, Cornelia had a solution ready and waiting for those bad commotions.

'Get rid of them. Just put them in the... h...?'

(Bored look from Cate.)

'In the h-h-h...'

(Bored look.)

'In the h-h-h-ho...'

(Bored look.)

'In the ho-o-o...'

'Holidays?'

'In the hole, that's right. In the hole.'

But commotions or not, when Cate sat down to go on reading, she could still feel those eyes watching her.

She tried to ignore the feeling, until she couldn't any longer – and she looked up with a jerk.

No one there.

Cate sighed. She was starting to get annoyed now. And what was annoying her most of all was the glimmer of hope that had suddenly flared up in her heart, out of nowhere. As if it had been hidden there all those years, silently, secretly waiting for a moment to strike.

*Mum*, she thought.

And immediately, she could have kicked herself.

'You stupid little kid,' she muttered.

*In the h-h-h-h…*

'Get knotted.'

She looked at her comic again, but she didn't feel like reading anymore. And then, when it started to rain as well, she packed up her things and stomped back home.

At home, everything smelled of cleaning stuff, but luckily Cornelia herself didn't seem to be around. The house was perfectly silent. Cate walked into the hall and tossed her backpack into a corner – and then she heard a single note on the piano in the living room.

Was Cornelia there after all? Was she polishing the keys?

She shuffled quietly across the hallway and peeped through the door.

It was her dad who was sitting at the piano. Seen from behind, he looked old and awkward: his tall, thin

torso hunched over the keys, his long legs folded clumsily beneath. His forefinger was still resting on a key. As he turned his eyes to the window, Cate could just about make out his expression. It looked very distant, but he didn't seem as far away in his own little world as he usually was. Just for a moment, Cate felt that he was seeing the same beautiful autumn as she was. As if he'd crept out of his boarded-up fortress and was taking a deep breath. And shivering: Cate saw a tremble run down his back.

Then he pressed another key. And a third. He added his left hand and began to play. Slowly, softly, solemnly.

The piano was never used. It just stood there gathering dust and growing uglier and uglier. The black finish was covered with speckles of grey as if someone had been spraying grey paint over it. That was probably something to do with Cornelia's cleaning stuff, Cate thought.

Cate had only heard her dad play the piano a couple of times in her entire life. Those few times, he had always played the same thing and she recognised the same music this time too. She'd never heard it anywhere else – she only knew it from when her dad played the piano.

She listened breathlessly, watching as her dad rocked back and forth on the stool like a slow giant, his long, slender fingers as graceful as dancers on the keys.

Suddenly he seemed to startle, and the spell was broken. As if the keys had suddenly become red hot, he

pulled his hands away. Then he jumped up and strode to the door that Cate had been peeking around, but he barely noticed her and almost knocked her over.

'Ah, Cate! How was school?'

'I don't have school on Sundays, Dad. Or in the autumn holidays either.'

Her dad was halfway up the stairs by now. He turned and looked at her.

'Oh yes,' he said. 'Sunday, yes.'

Then he continued up the stairs and disappeared into his room.

Cate gazed at the empty staircase for a moment before heading into the living room. The piano was on display in the middle of the room like some kind of monument. It looked pretty cool, but Cate had no idea what it was doing there, slap bang in the centre of the room. It seemed to belong to a different house and to a different life.

Sometimes Cate felt like she was growing up in a strange house filled with unfamiliar objects. While other families had photos on the walls or knickknacks on the windowsill that all told a story, the house where Cate and her dad lived was like a furniture showroom. All the memories seemed to have been systematically removed.

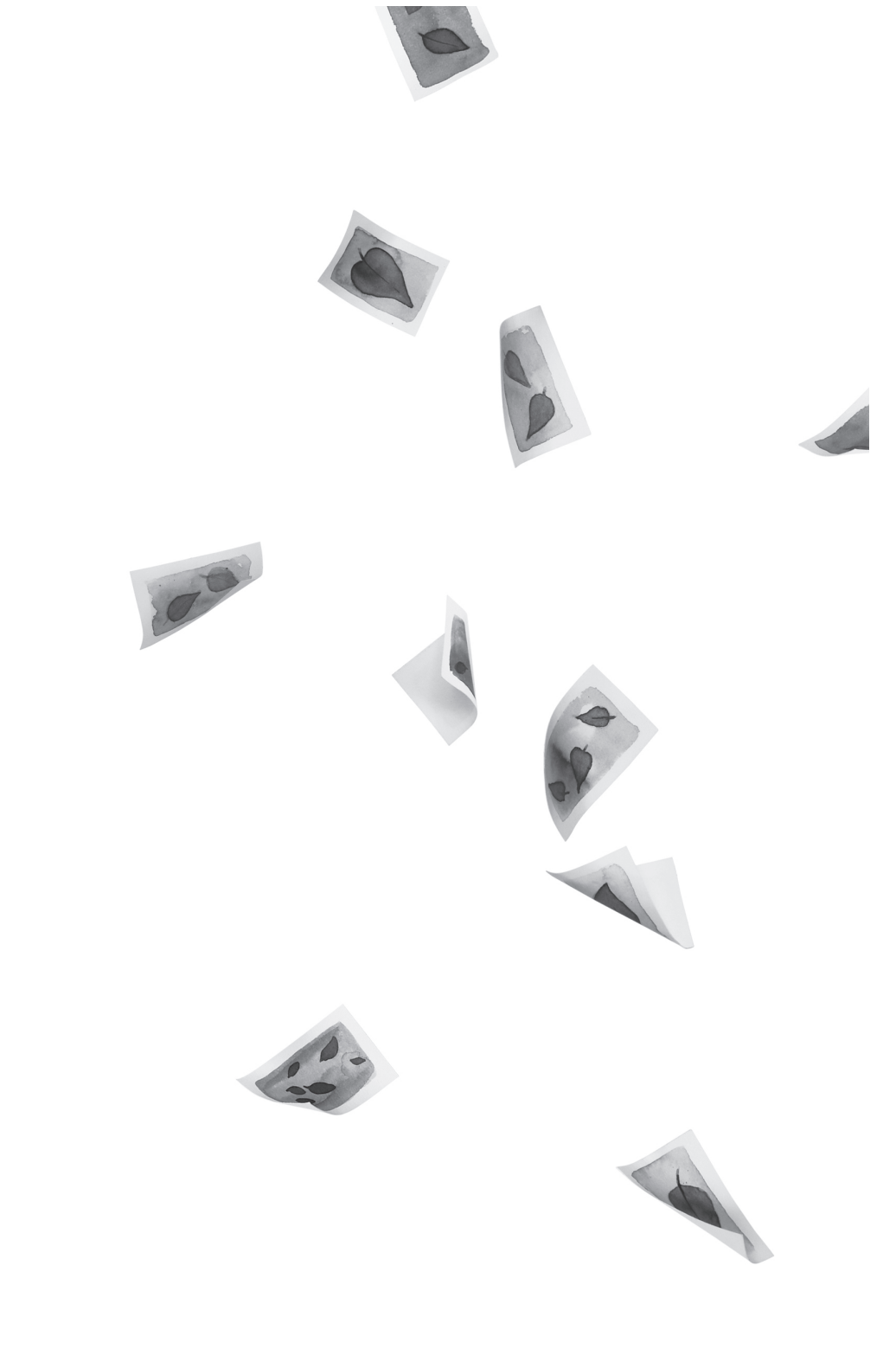
She sat down at the piano and tried to recreate the tune her dad had been playing. She did a pretty good job – she knew it by heart and her fingers soon found

the right keys. Then she spotted something on top of the piano: a business card. Printed in shocking-pink letters on the bright-yellow card were the words:

*Mrs Kano's Cinema*
*Movies Showing Nowhere!*
*Films you won't find anywhere else!*
*Films you've always wanted to see!*

On the back was an address that Cate recognised. It was where the Lux used to be, an old cinema that had been abandoned for years. Had someone given this business card to her dad? And 'movies showing nowhere'? What kind of films could they be?

Then the front door opened, and Cate heard the sound of Cornelia's humming. She slid the business card into her pocket and hurried into the hallway so she could run upstairs and see as little of Cornelia as possible.

'Ah, so our little layabout has returned home,' Cornelia said when she saw Cate. She was standing at the door with two shopping bags and smiling sweetly at Cate.

Cate said nothing and smiled back at her just as sweetly, but, with her hand still inside her pocket, she raised a middle finger. Then she dashed upstairs to her bedroom.