

CLOWN AROUND

Sonya is a miner.

She works in one of the iron ore mines of Kryvy Rih, Southeastern Ukraine.

When she was 5, Sonya migrated to the Yakut region of the USSR with her family.

Then she came back to her home city for higher education, and stayed here.

Caution, I'm offloading.

On the phone with Natasha:

[00:21] Hey hun. Yea, I've finished work, you're not sleeping?

Oh, you don't sleep before night shifts. Ok.

[00:34] We're heading to the district of the Twentieth. It's called that way because of the former name of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party Street.

[00:46] I grew up in a small, small village in the polar zone. The infrastructure was tiny, but people who migrated there were the best ones, in a way.

Those who weren't able to find their place here in the late Soviet times.

They went there to earn for a decent life. Because they were unable to steal or make money on profiteering etc.

For instance, high school graduates worked as loaders back there.

[01:53] Why would my parents decide to move? Because here, they couldn't afford to bring up two kids and educate them.

My brother was a doctor, he went to a medical school, so they needed money to keep going. Not for paying the tuition, back then it was for free. Just to support the family. So I grew up in another dimension.

[01:53] I've been working in this mine for 8 years now, I'm a lab assistant for radiometric equipment.

The mine is quite small, a bit over a kilometer deep, like in almost all the mines in Kryvy Rih.

[02:45] The mine is sort of a cross-section of our society. The attitude is like everywhere else probably.

There's lots of disrespect. Of course, some guys are polite, so their disrespect is silent, not for all to hear.

This doesn't surprise me, I'm a big girl and I've heard it all for too long. It's only when the closest person, say a husband, is disrespectful, then it hurts. Not when someone from outside says something like:

[03:00] «What are you doing here at all? Oh, like you've overworked now!»

My superiors are often like that, I think such tone is unacceptable.

Natasha (quoting):

[03:10] «What, are you tired already? You used to offload 120 cars!»

[03:20] Sometimes you can't even take a leak, pardon my language! And when finally you go, explaining that you just have to pee, then you spend another 15 minutes taking off your pants that are clingy because of all the sweat after running all over the place.

Sonya:

[03:33] When they start with all those 8th-of-March greetings... You know, throughout the year, you're being told that you're some kind of a lower rank creature, and then by the 8th of March they start saying –

[03:49] you're our domestic goddess! The best, the tenderest! Blabla!

And here's a present for you: 200 Hryvnias. (Or 170, after-tax!)

[04:04] Then I'm like wow, I really don't know where to invest such a fucking present.

[04:10] And there was this announcement: "Dear women! You're invited to a celebration party with French mime artists..."

[04:25] That was the last drop, I was fucking pissed when I also saw those 'mimes', damn!

[04:33] So I made my own greeting poster, saying:

"I don't care about your stupid greetings, why don't you pay me a decent salary?"

[04:37] You know, I'll puzzle it out on my own whether I'm cool, or tender, or incredible, alright?

[04:42] The king has no clothes, right? What is this whole circus for? To show oneself in the best light?

Those lies, they're just everywhere.

[04:59] The relations are such that you're the boss – I'm the fool. I'm the boss – you're the fool...

Natasha:

[05:06] For instance, I cannot buy a good fridge because I need to eat and pay the house bills.

Which is why – that's right, girls – the fridge is bought on credit. So it's not only that your shitty salary is 6 thousand, you're also wrapped up in loans.

Not so adidas if you get kicked out of your job, right?

Sonya:

[05:26] Natasha can work in a kindergarten.

Natasha:

I graduated as a nursery teacher. I'd worked in the kindergarten for 4 years. Not that I don't like this occupation, I think it's amazing.

[05:42]

And I do have a way with children, but that's not the point.

Sonya:

How would you live on that salary...

Natasha:

Yes, so after kindergarten I switched to work in trade.

[05:52]

Not so bad, but unofficially employed, so I needed the official employment period and went to work in the mine.

They told me at the time: all you can get here is the employment record.

You won't have a good salary anymore. That was 2005.

Back then they'd already started serious cuts in miners' salaries.

Sonya:

[06:29] And I think to myself, how you might look at us when we're telling you all of this. You're probably thinking, how fucknut these ladies are.

Why the hell are you doing this at all? Why did you even go there in the first place? And you'd be absolutely right.

[06:47] Life has bended us over backwards, that's a fact. Natalka doesn't have a husband, neither do I.

And you know that sort of talk, when they start saying: «Your revenue is okay for a woman.» That's when I just start to blow up.

[07:07] Now, what if when I pay my house bills, they tell me: - Oh, you're a woman! Half the amount is enough!

Or when I pay for my kid's studies, I'm told: - Oh, you're a woman, 70% will do.

Right?

What are you talking about, we're in the 21st century after all...

[07:21] I have a university degree. But I had the luck to live in Ukraine when NOBODY needed young professionals, that was 1992. Back then it was like, I'm this little angel with wings,

[07:38] so naive, thinking: «Oh! In the USSR, a job post was assigned to everyone after graduation.»

[07:43] Whoops – a punch in the guts! After the collapse of the Union, I was among the first who were not assigned with jobs.

Farewell – they said to us – now you're on your own.

[07:50] Right now I can explain it to my kid, so that she'd work things out for herself. But my parents didn't know how to do it back then.

[08:08] After my studies, I didn't know what to do with myself. I was upon the gad, working just anywhere, whatever turns up.

[08:20] We pull out here and turn left. Oh, I'll show you a historic place! That's where Sofia Masenko was born, and lived in the first 5 years of her life.

[08:35] You see, it's how our city is. One of my friends, she is the same age and works as a proofreader for a long time now. She thinks that factory jobs suck. Instead of chinning up and tilting at windmills, she'd rather just quit. But where to go?

[08:58] She says like, remote employment. How can't you understand, everyone cannot work remotely!

Let alone the fact that all the young people from the whole country went to Kyiv to work there.

[09:13] Plus, if I'm not a grammarian, I'm an engineer. What can I do remotely?

This is how our city is, mostly you either work at the metallurgical complex, or in the mines.

But anyway, it's great luck if you get hired at all. And it's only through wangle that it's even possible.

[09:46] That's right, clown around! You get down the mine, and you clown around. Cause it's the only way to not lose your mind!