

**Honorable Finalist, Level III**

**Maria Burdjalov**

**Letter to author Alexander Pushkin concerning his *Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish*  
(Сказка о рыбаке и рыбке)**

Dear Alexander Pushkin:

When I was a little girl, my favorite fairytale that my mom read to me was *The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish*. This tale became part of my nightly routine. My mom would come home from work and I would immediately beg her to read the story for the hundredth time. We would sit on her big queen bed, pillows hugging us, and she would read aloud the magical words that rested between the pages.

In the story, there is an old man who lives by the sea with his wife in a poor hut. One day, he fishes and has no luck catching any fish. On his last try, the old man throws his net into the sea and catches a golden fish. The golden fish pleads for him to spare her life and in return she will grant him any wish he desires. The old man, content with his life, lets the fish go without wishing for anything. Upon returning home, his wife yells at him for making the mistake of letting the fish go and not asking for anything. She demands that he seek out the fish and demand of it a new trough to replace their old, broken one. The old man returns to the sea, encounters the fish, and asks it to grant his wife's request, which it does. As time goes on, the fisherman's wife becomes increasingly greedy and covetous, and sends her husband out to sea again and again to demand of the fish everything from a new house to making her czarina over all the Russias; out of a sense of obligation to the fisherman, the fish complied. However, the day came when the wife went too far: she demanded that the fish grant her wish of being the ruler of the sea with the golden fish her servant. Outraged, the fish refused and punished the old woman by revoking all the previous wishes, leaving the fisherman and his wife in the same condition as they were at the start of the tale.

Your story has become a fond memory of my childhood not only for the lessons it taught but also for the moments it allowed me to share with my mom. As a child, I was not observant of how tired my mom was coming home from work, as I was mainly concerned with her reading the story to me. I was not observant of the fact that every time I asked her to read it to me, she would not refuse, no matter how exhausted her day had been. You unveiled to me my first realization of how devoted and loving my mom is towards me.

As a kid, I never fully comprehended the lesson within this fairytale and its significance in my life. In the story, the old man reluctantly keeps going back to the fish to please his wife. He demonstrates his unconditional love and support for his wife by doing everything he can to get her what she wants, no matter how excessive her requests become. My mom does the same thing. Every night, I would ask her to read the same story. Every night, she would say yes. Although my requests, when looking just at their context, were not burdensome or exhausting, there lies a certain sacrifice within them for my mom. She sacrificed a moment to herself in order to give me what I wanted. She knew I did not need to hear the story every night because I had heard it many times before, yet, there wasn't a night that went by where we didn't sit down together and read the story.

Back then, I was unaware of my subtle greediness towards my mom. Even today, I fail to acknowledge my mom's exhaustion when asking her to do things for me or to get something for

me. Similar to the fisherman's wife, I do not always know when to stop asking for things. As a child, asking for things is a tool to learn how the world works and to learn to achieve things. It is innocent and seemingly harmless. In the beginning of the story, the wife asks for small requests that are not hard for the fish to grant. However, her greediness pours out and she asks for too much which, in the end, caused a problem. I know that asking for something from my mom is not greedy, but the extent of those requests can be. I have a greater sense of appreciation for my mom because I see the sacrifices she makes for me and her willingness to make them. However, I fail to show her my appreciation every day in the way that she showed me her love every night when I was a child.

Not only does the story show me the generosity of my mom, it also gave me one of the most genuinely warm experiences of my childhood. Each time she read to me, I would feel safe sitting beside her, comforted by her voice. These moments were shared between us, connecting us. Without your fairytale, my connection with my mom would not be as strong as it is today. Thanks to you, these pleasant moments that my mom and I shared on those nights built a strong sense of security between us.

I have learned to recognize my mom's undeniable tendency to provide for me. This story helped me appreciate even more what my mom does, especially the subtle things she does. One day, I hope to be able to provide and show my mom the same love she has provided me with for 16 years and many nights.

Sincerely,  
Maria Burdjalov