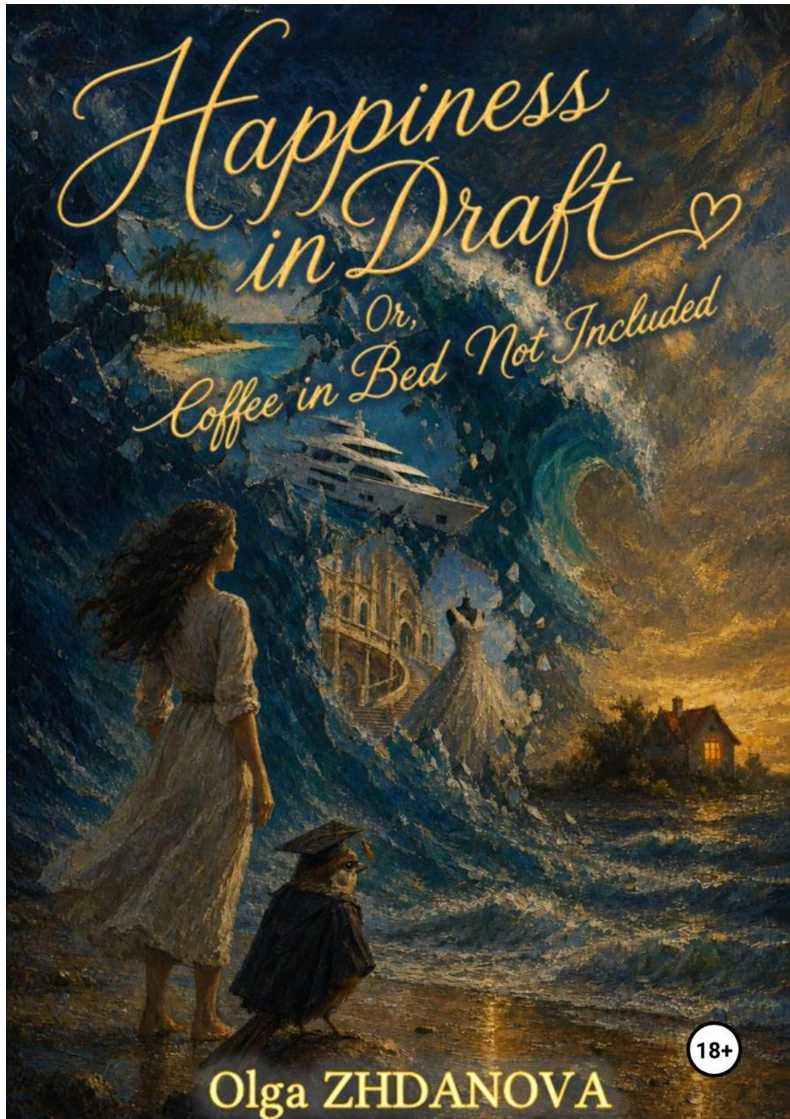


# Happiness in Draft

Or,  
Coffee in Bed Not Included



Olga ZHDANOVA

18+

**Ольга Жданова**  
**Happiness in Draft, or**  
**Coffee in Bed Not included**

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**Аннотация**

Ira is certain: real happiness starts later — after the mortgage's paid off, after the big career break, after the house by the sea and the man of her dreams. Then one day a fall from the roof lands her not in the hospital, but in a very strange journey. Her guide turns out to be a cheeky, oversized sparrow-slash-wizard, quite capable of opening the door to any life she's ever dreamed up.

Ira gets everything she ever wished for: the ocean and the handsome stranger, fame as a celebrated designer, a cozy home, kids, and a nearly flawless family portrait. Except every granted wish leaves behind a hairline crack. Why does a perfect life start to feel small after a while? And what if happiness was never something to earn, chase, or assemble out of the right props?

A warm, wry story about the eternal not quite, the habit of postponing life for better days, and the luxury we often fail to notice — even when it's sitting right beside us.

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# Ольга Жданова

## Happiness in Draft, or Coffee in Bed Not included

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She sat on the slightly unhinged roof of her parents' old house, weather-worn and time-scuffed, swinging her legs as she watched the clouds. Ira jokingly called it the ancestral nest of a princess of the blood, and returned to it again and again, fleeing the city's frantic hum for this warm harbor of stillness.

The evening was damp, cool, and overcast.

The birds, meanwhile, could not have cared less about temperature or time of day. They sang in several opinions at once, built nests, courted one another, and bathed in puddles.

"Spring must live inside them," Ira thought. Perhaps spring was not a season at all, but a way of looking at the world: not waiting for permission to be glad, but being glad before you had time to explain why.

If only we humans knew how to feel life that way. For us, happiness always begins after some sort of when. When you get the degree or the bonus. When you make a career or start traveling. When you meet The One or lose ten pounds. Then

there is the mansion, the Pekingese, the Mercedes, the one-carat diamond, the handbag... And the longer the list grows, the farther away life itself recedes.

But what if life begins at conception, rather than at some condition invented by somebody else?

If only I could wake in the morning and simply be pleased with the world. Not wonder how to pay off the mortgage, change jobs, or change brains; not resent the infernal alarm clock for ringing so early; not notice that once again nobody has brought me coffee in bed.

Just like that. At once. To feel at peace, like those lunatic birds, merely because the sun has risen and is tickling my nose. I remember that feeling. It used to live in me. Who switched it off, and when?

She remembered the doll her parents had managed to "get" for her birthday through a rare and mysterious connection. It had enormous blue eyes and a pink dress. It also came with a burgundy stroller made of remarkably respectable imitation leather. No other girl in the village had one. Before that, they had not even known toy strollers existed. Real ones were not guaranteed to every child. What ecstasy it had been!

Or lying in a meadow with her father, peering over the slope at a family of fox cubs.

Or winning a singing competition and hearing the conservatory director say they would admit her to the pop music department without an entrance exam.

Or when an audience applauds your presentation.

Or when you meet friends, or go on a date looking devastatingly lovely.

That simultaneous flutter and rush... the feeling that icicles are chiming inside you, buds are opening, and Sting is playing somewhere near your ribs.

So we spend our one and only life worrying, straining, endlessly turning nonsense over in our heads, getting upset, regretting the past, fearing the future, and suspecting that one day the final, comprehensive Catastrophe-with-a-capital-C may arrive.

And we are happy only in fragments?

What if the fragments are the whole, and people merely notice it now and then? Ira shooed the thought away at once. It would be far too insulting to admit that happiness had been beside her all along while she galloped past, busy looking for it.

How she longed to soar above the entire mess and sip life without a care. That must be how birds felt.

She watched a kite circling impossibly high overhead and envied it with every available fiber. Nothing, she thought, could possibly interfere with its enjoyment of flight.

From the ground, its freedom looked absolute. Ira did not think about the wind, hunger, or the work of staying aloft. Another person's life always looks flawless at a distance, because distance politely conceals both the cracks and the effort.

Ira sat dreaming of a genuine macho man with Andalusian

eyes, living somewhere on an ocean coast in a house beside a beautiful white-sand beach. At this very moment he was leisurely sipping Pinot Noir, watching the sunset, and dreaming of a Russian beauty with a wasp waist and tender lips, a woman who would give him delirious passion without trespassing upon his freedom or masculinity.

She dreamed of the world's most glamorous women wearing her elegant suits, and of her name being spoken beside the great Coco's. She dreamed that a magnificent cottage would rise where the little house stood, and her mother would never again work the night shift.

The kite climbed higher and higher. Ira tipped back her head, inspired by its flight and by her own thoughts of a happy life, and failed to notice the blanket slowly sliding down the wet roof... She had looked upward for so long that she stopped feeling what supported her. It was almost offensively symbolic. Unfortunately, Ira had no time to appreciate the symbolism—or to catch that splendid sensation of flight. A short cry. A sudden, violent pain through her whole body. Then darkness...

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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