
Leila and Masalik
Save the
Time Factory
Venera Abdullina

Венера Абдуллина

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Leila and Masalik have a new mission. Leila and children all over the world have been spending too much time glued to their gadgets. Now the Time Factory has ground to a halt, and tomorrow may never come. Leila must start the gears of the main clock using the power of living memories and fight monsters from the internet world.

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Chapter 1: The Missing Minutes

“Just five more minutes, Mommy! Honestly, just the last five minutes!” came a voice from the depths of the soft armchair.

Leila didn’t even raise her head. Her face was illuminated by the pale, bluish light of a tablet screen. On the screen, bright cartoon cats were jumping across the clouds, cheerful music was ringing out, and tearing herself away from this spectacle seemed utterly impossible.

Mom sighed quietly, standing in the doorway of the bedroom.

“Leila, my sunshine, you’ve been staring at the screen all evening. Look, it’s completely dark outside the window. It’s time for dinner, and then it’s time to tidy up your toys and go to bed. The weather outside was so wonderful today, and you never even went out for a walk.”

“In a minute, in a minute,” she muttered, her finger already automatically scrolling to the next video.

It felt to her as though she had only opened the tablet for a second. Well, maybe two. Where had the whole day gone? And why did Mom’s voice sound so sad? But the cats on the screen were calling to her more strongly.

Mika the chocolate bear sat in his place of honor in the center of the armchair, but Leila hadn’t hugged him once today. He sat with his head slightly tilted, and his black button eyes forlornly reflected the blue glare of the tablet.

Finally, Mom strictly but gently took away the gadget.

“That’s it, Leila, your limit for today is up. Time for bed.”

Leila pouted. She felt terribly offended. The world without a screen suddenly seemed gray, boring, and colorless. Reluctantly, she washed up, climbed under the covers, and turned toward the wall without even kissing Mom goodnight. A heavy, ringing silence settled in the room.

An hour passed, maybe two. Leila couldn’t fall asleep at all. Her eyes still saw colored flashes, and a stupid song from a video spun in her head. She turned over and looked at the digital clock on the bedside table. It showed 23:55.

The girl frowned. She waited a little longer. 23:55. The fiery green digits seemed frozen. She could hear the old clock on the wall striking loudly and heavily, like in slow motion: “Boooooooong...”, the sound fading away, unable to finish the strike.

Suddenly, the air in the room grew cool. With a quiet, strained sound: “Kch... ph... achoo!” a familiar little cloud appeared from under the bed. But it no longer glowed with gold like a delicious candy wrapper. The cloud was dirty gray, resembling a storm cloud.

Masalik popped out of it. The little dragon looked terribly tired. His transparent wings moved slowly, and when he sneezed, it wasn't cheerful ginger sparks that flew from his nose, but flakes of gray, dry dust.

“Masalik!” Leila whispered frightenedly, sitting up in bed. “What’s wrong with you? Are you sick?”

“Not me, Leila,” the little dragon replied in a weak voice, heavily landing on the edge of her pillow and folding his wings. “It’s the clock. It’s our whole world. Time... it’s stuck. Do you see?” He pointed his little paw at the frozen digits 23:55. “There is trouble in the Kingdom of Children’s Wonders. The Time Factory has stopped.”

Frightened goosebumps ran down Leila’s spine. She looked at Masalik, who had always been so energetic and cheerful, and now sat with his tiny head drooping.

“But how could time stop?” she asked softly, holding out her palm. The little dragon obediently stepped onto her fingers, and Leila felt that he wasn't hot at all like before, but cool, exactly like cooled tea.

“You see, Leila...” Masalik sighed, and another small gray cloud flew from his nose. “Time in your world and magic in ours are closely connected. Every minute a child spends productively —playing, fantasizing, helping Mom, reading books, or just going for a walk—turns into a glowing Crystal Butterfly at our Factory. These butterflies turn the gears of the Great Clock. But today... today you stared at the glowing screen for too long. You remember that you were chosen as the Guardian of the children's world, don't you?”

Leila remembered the cheerful cats on the tablet, and suddenly she felt uneasy.

“Screen screens,” the dragon continued sadly. “They are like vacuum cleaners. They don’t just show pictures; they suck out living minutes. The time the gadget ‘ate’ turns into sticky Gray Fog. Today, millions of children all over the world have lingered at their screens. There has become so much fog that it penetrated the Factory and completely jammed the main clock gear. If we don’t clean it before morning comes, time will freeze forever. And tomorrow will simply never arrive.”

“What do you mean—won't arrive?” Leila was frightened. “Does that mean there won’t be a morning? Mom won’t wake up, we won’t go to the zoo like we wanted?”

“There won’t be any ‘tomorrow,’” Masalik nodded sternly. “There will only be an endless, gray 23:55. Well, Guardian, shall we fly to save your lost minutes?”

“Let’s fly!” Leila nodded decisively. “Only... how can we fly if your cloud has turned gray and your wings barely move?”

Masalik squinted slyly, and for a second, the old mischievous spark flashed in his bead-like eyes. “My magic grows weak from screens, that’s true. But it comes alive from real feelings! Give your Mika a hug, and a tight one. Remember how strong your invisible thread is?”

Leila quickly turned to the armchair, grabbed the chocolate bear, and pressed him tightly, tightly to her heart. “Forgive me, Mika, for paying no attention to you at all today,” she whispered, burying her nose in his plush crown.

And immediately a miracle happened. The emerald seam on the bear’s ear began to glow brightly. This light transferred to Leila’s hands, and from her to Masalik. The gray fog around the dragon dissipated with a hiss, and his wings fluttered very, very fast, making a ringing crystal sound. The gray cloud under the bed instantly flared up with a gentle silver light.

“Now that’s more like it!” Masalik squeaked joyfully, soaring toward the ceiling. “Hold on tight, Guardian! Course set for the Time Factory!”

Leila’s room began to sway smoothly. The walls parted, but this time they were not flying among singing stars and sweet clouds. A strange, endless space stretched around them, where huge gears, clock faces without hands, and long glowing ribbons resembling film strips floated in the air. But all of this was covered by a dense, sticky gray haze that made it difficult to breathe.

Ahead, on a huge floating island, a majestic building appeared, resembling an old railway station with a hundred towers. This was the Time Factory. But instead of white steam, a thick, dark cloud hung over its chimneys, and the main gates were tightly shut.

The cloud carrying Leila and Masalik landed softly right at the entrance. The journey had begun, and Leila was ready to face the Gray Fog head-on.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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