

## **“An Out-of-Tune Piano, An Accordion”** by Sofia Andrukhovych

### **Why?**

*Succinctly describe why we are covering this story.*

By highlighting stories from outside of Russia, we’re hoping to bring more attention to modern authors that are creating exceptional art that we think you should be reading.

This short story is included in *The White Chalk of Days: The Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series Anthology*.

### **Author Background**

*What are the relevant biographical details to this work? Why was this particular author important?*

Born in 1982, Sofia is the daughter of Yurii Andrukhovych who is also an author and translator. In 2014 her novel *Felix Austria* won the BBC Ukrainian’s Book of the Year award. A Ukrainian-Polish feature film *Viddana* was released in 2020 based on it. In March 2021, she Andrukhovych received the Women in Arts Award in literature.

### **Story Background**

*When was this story published? In what journal was it published? Where in the author’s chronology does this story fit?*

Published, in English, in *The White Chalk of Days: The Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series* anthology, ed. Mark Andryczyk, 2017.

[From the translator:](#) “Sophia Andrukhovych’s story, “An Out-of-Tune Piano, an Accordion,” was inspired, Chernetsky said, by some of the local characters Sophia and Andriy encountered when they moved to a touristic area north of the capital, Kyiv, some years ago.”

Con’t: “She’s also moving from writing things that were semi-autobiographical to observing others; people who are quirky, who are perhaps damaged or not normative on the mental health spectrum. But she is loving towards her characters. We get to know these people and to empathize with them. I find that her writing conveys very well a sense of empathy to people of different backgrounds and

cultures, very much unlike herself. And this is something that relates to the essays she has been writing since the escalation of the war.”

## **Story Notes**

*Include a very short summary here. What are the important quotes from the story?*

- Incredibly poetic opening and rhythm throughout the story. The first two paragraphs are 6-7 lines each but are only one sentence each.
- Borderline ornamental language: “...you can make your cute skeptical grimace: puffed loewe lip like a moist cherry...”
  - Part of Andrukhovych’s personal style and voice, but I would perhaps consider it an intentional device. There is an ethical dimension to our perception—can we see the beauty in the everyday? In the common?
    - In the garden scene: “The tomatoes reciprocated...”
    - But then compare this to immediately after: “I won’t give them to strangers! To no one! They’ll rot!”
- Uses parentheses to switch POVs. For instance, switches to Renat’s POV for “(I am sixty, she’s forty, I have two kids and six grandkids, real estate and savings; she has alcoholism, infertility, a room at a boarding house, and messy personal life)...”
- An incredible work of translation on certain aspects here: “Viola thinks” septic amber brings September...”
- “This was like the purr of the granulators, agglomerators, and shredders made by Berlingtong, the Japanese company whose sales rep Rant was (just one capsulator sale—and a trip to Sri Lanka is guaranteed!).
  - Natural slowly changing
- “...the wandering ghost camp is already here, close by, in our forests.”
  - Quieted, but not rebuffed, by the arrival of dawn
- Re: Renat
  - “He’s like an old Steinway with a cracked frame.”
  - Narrator focuses on details — the nature and character of the forest, now on the material goods which describe Renat’s character
- Only when we come to Viola does description move beyond mere object
  - From “Yachts” to “He loved watching her expose her face to the wind when riding in his yacht...”

- “Oh Renat, how much did this sly old old fox of a man love them, his kids. His short fingers dug into the edge of the table, so that the tips hurt—this is how much he craved to stay just a little bit longer here, next to them.”
  - Kids in reference to his actual children, though physical proximity would indicate Viola and Methodius
- “With each passing day he felt that he was melting more and more into thin air, becoming semitransparent like smoke from burnt grass.”
- “Empty hallways covered with smashed bricks breathed stuffy moisture. In the rooms, the cdxough the cracks in the floor and the walls, plants broke through, little twisted pines, ferns, lichens in puddles of stinky brownish water. Iron beds with nets, bent, sagging like a tired udder.”
  - Evocative of a long out-of-use hospital?
  - The plants are a nice turnaround from evoking life in the garden, but here represents abandonment, a lack of human involvement.
- During the dance
  - “The boy held Viola tightly with his strong, bony hands, so tightly that it was impossible to break out, there was no strength left even to breathe...”
  - Until it’s disrupted by, presumably, Methodius
- “And Renat, the old diseased predator, dragged his hurting body into the pitch-dark space of the forest.”
- “It’ll be time soon, kids.”
  - Comes immediately after Renat says they (he and Viola) will never leave each other. A small lie followed by a moment of honest reflection? Or is the first a declaration that death would not be a separation for them? To this point, Renat seems to have been fighting to remain who he was as a young man — but only insofar as he can push himself (doesn’t even want dentures, external help)