

## “I Do Not Want To Be a Sperm Donor.” Swedish Citizen is Demanding the Return of His Daughters Taken by Their Mother to Belarus

Nikolas and Svetlana (the name of the heroine was changed at her request) met through a marriage agency. They had been corresponding back and forth for two years, and Svetlana came to the man in Sweden in 2008. The couple lived together for nine years, they had two daughters. There were conflicts, but the former spouses say they tried to maintain relationships until the last moment. One day Nikolas returned home and did not find either the children or their mother. Svetlana together with the girls flew to Belarus. The parents have been arguing about the place of residence of their girls for two years. “I wanted to save my children,” says the mother. “As long as I live, I’ll seek to get my daughters back,” says the father.



“Today is my daughter’s birthday,” says **Nikolas**. “I came to congratulate her and to see my girls. But I do not know if their mother will allow us to meet. I am 60 years old, I have no other children. They are the meaning of my life.”

### **Father: I will fight for my children as long as I breathe**

According to Nikolas, when **Svetlana** came to Sweden in 2008, he tried to immediately help her to adapt in a new country - to get documents, get a job and get into the university. Svetlana is almost 20 years younger than Nikolas. Their relationship was not registered. However, according to the Swedish law, after five years of living together, cohabitation is equal to official marriage.

"I wanted her to sign the marriage contract, but she refused and never explained why," explains Nikolas.

**"Why was it so important to you? Were you afraid for your property?"**

"No, I wanted to resolve all the issues, especially regarding children, in order to avoid the situation in which we are now. Marriage contract is a common practice in Sweden."

According to Nikolas, the problems started as soon as the couple began to live together.

"We are too different. She was pathologically jealous of me, made scenes. I could not even speak to other women. When we went out, I tried to look down, not to look at anyone so that she would have no complaints about me."

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The couple hoped that the relationship would be fixed when the baby was born. But since the birth of the first daughter, the situation has only worsened.

"The labor was hard," recalls Nikolas. "The first six months the child was completely on me. One time when I was so tired that I asked Svetlana to wash the dishes, she threw a real tantrum. The thing is, we are too different. Today I can say that she was lazy, she had no goals. I had to work and do everything around the house."

Within a couple of years, they had a second daughter. Nikolas did not like the way Svetlana treated the children.

"Unlike her, I try to educate children with democratic values and principles, everything is based on communication. From a very early age I studied with girls, they are very capable, which was also noted this in kindergarten. I do not agree with Svetlana's authoritarian manners. I know that she grew up in a house where it was normal to beat children, as she told me at the beginning of our relationship. But I will never agree with that!"

**"Have you ever used violence against your spouse?"**

"No, I am against violence. Svetlana said in court that I morally pressured her. But it was vice versa. She allowed herself to hit me several times."

Trying to improve their relationship, Nikolas suggested seeing a psychologist. And although the wife initially refused, they still had several meetings with a specialist.

"The situation was aggravated when she began to attend the Russian Orthodox Church with our children. I am an Orthodox person myself, I respect the faith. However, I was alarmed by her new hobby and acquaintances that she met there. Once we went to the subway with the eldest daughter. Suddenly, she moved to the other side. I asked what was the matter. She replied that she did not want to sit next to a black passenger. I was very surprised, asked why. "The woman in the church said they are dirty people," she replied to me. I was so angry! It is unacceptable. Her kindergarten had a black employee, and you can often meet such people in the city. How can you teach this to children? And once Svetlana showed me on the phone a photo of a guy in a T-shirt with the image of Putin. I did not understand who it was. "This is the son of a priest," she said. "Look, what a great fellow he is! He is a patriot!" I asked her what they were doing in the church, and what politics had to do with it. There was a moment when my daughter started kissing my hands. I asked what she was doing. She replied that she was taught this in the church. I am not against religion, I

am a believer myself. But I didn't like what happened to my children after such meetings. I believe that it was the woman from the church who helped Svetlana take the children away from me.”

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This happened on one of the April days in 2017. Nikolas, as always, took the children to the kindergarten in the morning. In the evening their mother had to pick them up. Upon returning home after work, he did not find either Svetlana or the daughters.

“I called the kindergarten. I was told that mother took the children because they needed to see a doctor. This was a lie, we had not planned anything like this.”

“Nikolas was grief-stricken,” says the godmother of the children. “He cried like a little baby. He called Svetlana, the police, hospitals, friends and relatives of Svetlana. We had seen the whole family the day before, nobody knew that Svetlana was planning to leave for Belarus.”

According to Nikolas, more than a week had passed before the spouse answered him that she was staying with the children in Belarus.

“A court in Sweden acknowledged that she did not have the right to take away children to live permanently in another country without my consent. My daughters are citizens of Sweden by birth. A Swedish court recognized me as the sole guardian. For two years I've been trying to prove it in Belarus. I don't have a possibility to participate in raising children, I cannot see them at any time, I feel that they are being turned against me. I want to give them education and a decent future. I don't want to feel like a sperm donor. These are my daughters, I do not have and, I think, there will be no other children. And I will fight for them as long as I breathe.”

## **Mother: you can live well in Sweden if you are ready to pay for it with your children**

Now Svetlana herself calls the emigration to Sweden a “big mistake”.

“It was online dating through a marriage agency. Nikolas offered me to get married, the opportunity to study and work in Scandinavia. I did not feel comfortable there, I had many doubts, but in 2008 I went to my beloved person. When you are a tourist, you go in a group with your people, you are shown pictures - everything is beautiful and great. When you are an immigrant, you need to get used to the fact that you will never be at home. You have to accept the fact that you will always be in second place, you are a stranger. I thought that when I came I would study, but I had to go straight to work. As a result, my performance record there was very good, but it took a lot of work. In Sweden, you need to invest five times more than in Belarus in order to achieve everything.”



The couple lived together for nine years. According to Svetlana, her partner refused to marry even after the birth of the children.

“He haven’t worked anywhere for seven years, of which five I fully supported the family. He invested all his money in the purchase of an apartment, there was not enough for renovations, and he asked me to take a loan of 10 thousand euros. Of course, I agreed because I thought we were a family. As a result, I paid the loan myself. After five years of living together, cohabitation is equal to official marriage. Nikolas said that I had to sign a document stating that I had no claims to his apartment. I did it because I believe that the family cannot be built on self-interest. I loved children, loved him and hoped that we would still have a strong and good family after all the trials.”

She says that Nikolas was lying when he claimed that she refused to sign the marriage contract.

“When the girls were born, not everything was good, but I had to endure. I raised the issue of marriage registration several times, but his position was “categorically not.” He did not explain anything, and I did not insist. If a person wants something, he should say so.”

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Svetlana recalls that the conflicts intensified when Nikolas went to work as a math teacher.

“He immediately took half of the child allowance (in Sweden, the father is entitled to this), he divided all family expenses for the two of us, although I was still on maternity leave (my daughter was 1.5 years old), and I had to go to work and put the child in the kindergarten. He provoked me and made constant scandals at home, recorded everything. If I were so tired that I left the dishes in the sink after dinner, he would photograph it. He kicked me out of the house in the presence of children, forbade me to invite Russian-speaking friends. Under the pretext of improving our family relationships, I was forced to go to a psychologist, where he blamed me for being a bad mother, a

religious fanatic, for raising the children badly and incorrectly, for the fact that I didn't let them go to homosexual festivals. The girls at that time were one and a half and four and a half.”

**“Why did you refuse the professional help? You have a degree in psychology.”**

First of all, in Scandinavia, a visit to a psychologist is documented. Then every word can be used against me. Secondly, I think it is better to come to an agreement at home. It seems to me that when strangers begin to interfere, irreversible things can happen. Living in Sweden, especially during the last years, I was always afraid that children would be taken away from me. In my opinion, all parents there live in such fear. Children can be taken away without explaining the reasons. My friends were faced with such situations... And this tolerant country, for some reason, is not very tolerant towards the Russian Orthodox Church. The children were forbidden to wear baptismal crosses in the kindergarten.

**“Nikolas said he was against your visits to the church, because there was politics involved ...”**

“What does the politics have to do with the church? Our city had only two small Orthodox parishes. The church was the only place where I could meet with compatriots. And for my children, this was the only opportunity to speak Russian, because outside the church they heard Russian only from me.”

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**“What did your family have to do with homosexual festivals?”**

“I was faced with the fact that a negative attitude, rejection of homosexual relationships may be the reason that children can be taken away from the family.”

**“But when you went to Sweden, you knew that same-sex relationships were legalized there, didn't you?”**

“No, I didn't. I did not sit and study the documents. I was not going to Sweden, I was going to my beloved person.”

Svetlana insists that Nikolas knew that she was planning to go with her children to Minsk to apply for the citizenship in Belarus for her youngest daughter.

“In April 2017, I flew to Minsk with my children (with his consent) in order to register the youngest child in Minsk and make a Belarusian passport for her, at that time there was no Belarusian embassy in Sweden. When I arrived in Minsk, I suddenly clearly understood that I could not continue this way, that I was powerless and could not protect my children in Sweden.”

**“Why did you not settle the issue in court while you were still living in Sweden?”**

“Sometimes there are situations when you have to make non-standard decisions if there is a matter of the life and health of children. I was trying to save the marriage for as long as I could. When I came to Belarus with children, I realized that I could be protected here.”

**“According to law, mother and father have equal rights. However, you decided at your own discretion that the children would live with you, without talking to Nikolas. Don't you think this is unfair to the father?”**

“What would you say to the fact that he, without asking, not respecting me as the mother of his children, went to the supervisor (from the child protection services. - ed.) and said that I was a bad mother, harassed everyone at home and was dangerous for children? He took photographs, recorded our arguments. I guess he planned to take away my children, deprive me of parental rights. Moreover, he kicked me out of the house in front of the girls. I was protecting my children.”

Photo: unsplash.com

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In Sweden, the child custody case was heard in absentia; Svetlana did not come to the trial.

“If the children return to Sweden, they will never be able to see the mother who will be imprisoned,” insists Svetlana. “In Belarus, children can communicate with both mom and dad. In Sweden, they will not have a mother, and it is unknown whether they will ever have. Moreover, children adapted well and very quickly in Belarus.”

Svetlana insists that she does not prevent the children from meeting with their father. According to her, she initially even offered him to live in her apartment.

“To which Nikolas replied that we live in the “black ghetto” and “what can this country give to his children?”. And he added that “he will do everything possible until the end of his life to take my children from me and return them to Sweden,” explains our heroine. “Now I think I should never have left Belarus. In Sweden, you can live well, sleep soundly if you are ready to pay for it with your children. I am grateful to our country and the authorities for protecting the life and future of our children.”

Svetlana points out that the father does not support daughters financially. Nikolas says that he brought gifts to the girls and transferred 230 euros to the mother’s account several times, but then stopped until, as he explains, the children will be placed in his custody.

## **After two years of court proceedings parents still cannot reach an agreement**

Nikolas insists that the children were taken away illegally, which means they must be returned to Sweden.

“This is a case of international law,” explains his lawyer, **Yelena Mashonskaya**. “There is the Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. Many people, when they hear “international child abduction”, immediately imagine criminals and a ransom. But this is a civil law convention. How is the child abduction defined according to this document? The countries that signed the Convention, as Belarus did it in 1997, agreed that any removal and relocation of children without the consent of the second parent would be a violation of the Convention. What does removal mean? The parent may give consent to the other parent to take the child abroad for the holidays. However, if the child does not return, it is considered to be illegal retention. All pivotal decisions must be agreed, including the change of residence of children. In practice, some fathers or mothers, unfortunately, believe that the child belongs to them, and the second parent has the right to communicate and raise the child while the adults are in a relationship. But by law both parents have equal rights. And we believe that this situation should be considered within the framework of the Convention, which the mother of the children has violated. Moreover, we should not forget that this is not so much about the rights of the parent, but rather about the rights of children who, not of their own will, are at the center of the conflict.”

“I do not want to be a sperm donor.” Swedish Citizen ... <https://news.tut.by/society/634020.html?crnd=80999>

Svetlana believes that since her children are not only citizens of Sweden, but also citizens of Belarus, the dispute over the determination of the place of residence of the children should be resolved in a Belarusian court, which decided that girls should stay with their mother. Nikolas does not agree with this and intends to appeal the decision.