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МАРИНА КУЖМАН

HELL AND PARADISE

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Hell and paradise

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Марина Кужман

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MARINA KOUJMAN

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PREVIEW

Why Hell and why Paradise? When you read my book- I think you found answer. But if shortly-inspiration for this book was my life in New York mostly 1995—1999. Even why the cover for this book: Twin Towers the highest buildings in New York in that time. When I see these Two I feel happiness and new building on the same place after 9/11 not evoke It. I don't know may be it just my feeling, but all the book is my perception of reality. The story begin from happenstance-casual acquaintance with American musician. Steve was not so famous, but he was amazing beautiful personality and everything was wonderful in him, if remind Anton Chekhov: " ... and face and manners and clothes and thoughts and feelings.

And plus he was divine talented. He was music itself. He was magnetically attractive.

It was not possible not to fall in love with this irresistible man. How Shakespeare wrote: ". . . if love could eat, she would eat music..." But then other meeting with another interesting man-James Bond.

How Michel Foucault wrote:

"Power is worthy of love, and when it has a positive effect,

progress brings knowledge and pleasure.” It was happiness – to contemplate such compelling understanding generous enough in all his the best kindly exertions and plus it looked that he was not cracked nowhere. New love gave huge motivation for spiritual growing. Love refresh life. Everything is born of love, it is influence on all sides of life.

There is a lot of poetry in this history, and if you asked only the artistic old side, you could create a beautiful illusion, inspire a golden dream, but I am agree with Dostoyevsky’s observation: “it is better to be unhappy and know the worst, than to be happy in a fool’s paradise.” But it is really not so easy to follow this advice when one is watching a loved one repeatedly relive the pain of loss

brought about by well meaning “truthtellers.”

There is no dignity in living a life of the constant emotional pain. But sadistic people created this atmosphere – humiliation and sadism have much less dignity then to whom they are tortured.

And in many ways I wrote this book following observation’ Michelle Fuco “..The real political task is to ensure that the political violence that is carried out behind the scenes in them is exposed, so that people can fight against them.”

We have to know where we live. It is very popular talking about fascism and Stalinism which was 60—70 years ago, but it is hard to see and write about that it is going now here in country in city where in the Centre building UN and Statue of Liberty.

It is very difficult to talk about the manifestations of terrible sadism, experiments on living people, a gross violation of human rights and you live among people in the center of the world and nobody cares about you and your rights.

And again paraphrasing Foucault:

I'm talking about the ability to create, about the technical difficulty of writing this book.

And not only because English is not your first language, what is happening does not fit into the usual framework, so I chose English and as a child, faced with a new environment for it, I learned how to describe it, respond to it as it should, learn to speak and think about it is completely for itself in a new way. I think that such actions can be defined as creative. The mostly hardly was found definition for everything what it was in that tragic and sad time and then shallow time.

If we understand democracy, we will not be divided into classes, not ordered hierarchically then it absolutely clear that we are extremely far from it, It is also quite clear that we live under a regime of class dictatorship, a class power that is imposed through violence.

Hell and Paradise

STREET

In January 1995, I rented a place on Seventh Avenue and Fifty-Fifth Street, a big apartment in Manhattan.

With me in the room was a girl of forty- five from the Philippines. She worked in housekeeping for rich people. I worked in bookkeeping for a seafood company. I started working there when I used to live in Brooklyn, but now it is very far from the place where I live. It is about two hours of traveling on the train and bus, and the owner pays me just \$6 an hour. My duty was to accept orders for fish on the phone from restaurants and cafes. My boss, an old Greek, always bought good lunch for me from the restaurant and sat near close, too close, talking about his life – how hard it is, how he's sorry that he left his own country for the USA, and how much he has to work now to support his family, but his friends and relatives who stayed in Greece have a much more easy and happy life.

I felt nauseated from the smell of the fish, I was tired from hearing different voices on the phone, and I felt uncomfortable having lunch with my boss.

I was thinking how to change, how to find something better and easy – more money and less effort. I know all in life takes effort – overcoming aversion and having perseverance and patience just serve it.

One evening, the girl from the Philippines, with a friendly

smile, persuaded me to go with her to a dancing place. It was a big enough space with a hall. The public was very diverse. It was an evening of dancing for adults. Mostly people were over forty. Some women were dressed very pretentious in long dresses with long foxtail and open chest. For me, it looked very funny, and they did their face with a lot of cosmetics. They looked like battered bourgeoisie in the beginning of Soviet movies. There I saw a lot of women who looked simple, came here from a different country, and worked here as babysitters and housekeepers. They helped their family because dollar was very high and they were full of hope to find a good groom mostly even after forty who, later explained by my roommate from the Philippines, were still virgins because they were religious and responsible. I was dressed in a short skirt and blouse. I came with the promise of my friend to acquaint me with men who can help me to find a new job, and she really introduced me to a few men. One was a retired military man. He took me dancing a few times and asked me to meet with him and promised to help me. The other was a German man but born in the USA; he said the same. And then the other was a pharmacist; he just liked me very much and wanted to date me in the future. Need to tell that in that time special, when I moved in the center of Manhattan, I became a success among men. They all were looking for a girlfriend or wife, but I that time again started to miss Boris and my daughter, whom I was missing permanent, and my plan again was to make some money and go back to Russia.

When I met with Lexington, the German man, he gave me advice to start a massage business and make fast extra money. Lexington helped me to begin by making an ad in one popular Manhattan newspaper and instructed me how I must be – that if I don't like the voice on the phone, don't go, and if I hear what I do not like.

But he observed me and said, "Nothing will happen to you. Nobody will touch you. You look very tough." Soon, my ad appeared:

"Russian college girl make massage for tired Americans. 24 hours. In and Out."

I made some preparations. I bought phone with answer serves, Canadian black suit, shirt, skirt, and jacket, fitting me very well, emphasizing my slender figure. And one woman for whom one time in a week I worked as a housekeeper gave me two new white silk blouses. Also I bought beautiful black silk shoes with high heels.

The massage business, staying one on one with different men, taught me not to be afraid of men. Very often, I went to a new address, stayed one on one in the apartment with a new man, but nobody abused me. Thank you, American women. They taught them to be gentle.

Not just in public, but they are nice and respectful when there are no witnesses. Here, any conflict between a woman and a man, always the police will be on the woman's side. I remember when I came to the USA, on TV was a longtime ongoing hearing

on a case: one Latino woman cut the penis of her American husband, and the court approved her. It shows that even married men can have sex with his wife just when she wishes it. But very soon, one event broke all my business.

STEVE

It was March 16, 1995, on a warm spring evening. I was dressed in my almost new Canadian suit. I knew I looked decent and fitting, but I never went to a bar in New York, and in that evening, suddenly, I decided to come to a neighbor Irish bar close by. It was Friday, just on the eve of St. Patrick's Day. I opened the door and observed. It was very crowded there. Suddenly, I saw a free space near a very elegant man. I didn't think long; I went and sat.

"What you like to drink?" right away the bartender politely asked, holding out to me the menu.

"Absolute," I answered.

I made my first sip. The sound of music playing was "Welcome." I felt very relaxed. My very handsome neighbor, seemingly inaccessible, suddenly turned to me. Oh, what a wonderful face it was. If the eyes are the mirror of the soul, it was a mirror that in one moment can fix all the damage, create harmony, fill you with light to enjoy life right here and right now.

I was reminded of the words of my old friend: "Wealth is the man himself" – it was in this case.

He looked at me so carefully with the restrained greed of the artist going to capture your image for centuries and centuries. He looked at me with almost amazement. I felt really happy, as in like my early childhood when I was just over a year old and

the whole family gathered at the samovar at the table over which hung a beautiful pink shade with fringe in my father's hands; such a serene state when you are loved only for the fact that you are you. "What you drink?" he asked with pleasantly vibrating voice, so touching, smiling. "Absolute," I answered, smiling to his smile. "You have accent," he noted slightly absently. "From where are you?" I was feeling that he likes me and he was interested about me, and I understood that he is not the man who likes yes, yes – no, no, and I was curious what he thinks about me.

"What you think from where is I?" He started guessing. "From Germany?"

"No."

"From Fr" "From Czechoslovakia?"

"No.

I am from Russia," in the end I recognized. "From Russia," he repeated with amazement and asked right away,

"How is Russia?"

"Good. Democracy," I said with sadness in my voice.

"But people hungry?" he said as if reading my thoughts.

"What is your name?"

"My name is Charlotta."

And then he introduced himself.

"My name is Steve Benderoth. I work in TV. I make music for a commercial channel.

What about you?" he asked.

"I am an artist."

Of course, I was not. But I cannot and didn't want to say that I am a cleaning lady or massage therapist or masseuse or economist or bookkeeper. It will look very prosaic. But I want something miracle like he is like my mood now. He is looking for a relative soul, and I don't want to disillusion him. I want that he will be happy in that moment like I am now. "I feel scared," I said. I was reminded of the moment I was afraid to come in the bar. "With me, you cannot be afraid anything," he said confidently in his own voice. My glass already

was empty. "Can I buy you drink?" "Later," I said shyly.

"When later?" he asked again.

"When later?" the barman repeated with a friendly smile, pouring me a glass.

"And also I am writing poetry."

And I read a few lines that really came to my head in that moment.

"I will put this with music," he said approvingly.

"Are you married?" he asked. "No, I am divorced."

"Do you have children?"

"Daughter. She is eleven, and she is with my parents."

"Why did you come here?" he asked again. "It is very hard to stay in one city and even in one country with the man whom you love a lot and with whom everything is finished."

He looked at me with understanding and wonder.

"I am going through divorce too," he said, "and I have two daughters, four and six years old. I have a house in Long Island,

and tomorrow I have to go to see my children. Do you want go with me?" I didn't answer. It will not be pleasant new woman and especially in their house. It may be even painful for her. I don't want be the reason for somebody's pain, I thought, but I didn't tell anything. "Can I invite you for dinner?" he asked.

"Maybe tomorrow," I said indecisively.

I felt a magical attraction to him. My close plan on the eve of back to Russia. I miss my daughter very much, and I felt that this new meeting will turn on me here again. I thought, from where it is unknown this cosmic attraction is such an incomprehensible yet sudden affinity with this man? We got out of the bar. It was a very unusually warm evening. It was the beginning of spring, March 16, but like summer. Steve was without a jacket even.

Soon, we were in a beautiful classic-style Italian restaurant. The hall was almost empty; it was very late that time already. We sat at the table face-to-face. When I looked at him, it was amazing – how wonderful he was so excellent, magnificent, and superior.

And he looked at me with wonder and pronounced, "Madonna."

I felt so full of confidence in him. It is like one sheet of paper torn many times ago suddenly connected and became whole again and everything came together so exactly and easy. Later I wrote this poem:

I remember that evening in Irish bar, We were sitting there

in half-nightmare. Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary—

That thought suddenly came to us. We've known each other for a thousand years – That's our attraction's secret.

What does this meeting mean When a moment equals to eternity?

The waiter brought the menu. I ordered salmon. I didn't understand why, but Steve wondered about my choice. Our dinner finished after midnight. Then we walked to his apartment. It was close, on West Fifty-Fifth Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. He has a small onebedroom apartment on the sixth floor in the building with an elevator. When we came to his apartment, I sat on the sofa in the living room, and he told me about his life. Recently, his father died, and his partner too, like result he got depression and became almost impotent, which started a problematic relationship with his wife. He was talking and I was listening, but, mostly, I was admiring him, how wonderful he is. His voice – every word, every syllable, every sound – made big sense. I understood that a lot of sad events happened to him, but it is so nothing compared to what he is now and here, so unusual, marvelous, extraordinary with his beautiful face and astonishing voice that you want to listen to, like music. Voice in which has everything: feeling, sense, sensation, sentiment, pulse, significance, point, denotation, intellect, mind, intelligence, common sense, wisdom, opinion, account, and belief. Here I saw abundance. I saw a shining semicircle above his head. It was a halo – a sign of holiness, how it was later explained

to me in church. Steve was a Protestant, but he does not go to the church.

Then I asked about his religion. He smiled and said, "God is in my heart."

Morning came not visibly. I had a short sleep on the sofa, and Steven went to his bedroom. In the morning, I did not feel that it was a night almost without sleep. I felt a huge energy between us, which was giving power.

We were in the elevator. A woman, his neighbor, was there too. He used to live for a long time in this building. It was his apartment before marriage.

"Charlotta," he introduced me. "She is from Russia."

The woman nodded friendly and told her name. We went to have breakfast. The evening's charm did not go away; it became even stronger. I was enjoying every moment with my new friend, and he changed his plan and did not go to Long Island that day.

We went to the street. There was a strolling celebration in honor of Saint Patrick. We walked little bit, and after, we went to my room.

I needed to change clothes. In my room, we made love.

Then Steve proposed to go to a striptease place where his acquaintance, a girl from Czechoslovakia, was working. She was very young and very beautiful and lovely, and we became friends right way.

“I am stupid. I am stupid that I work in this dirty place,” she said, “but what to do? We don’t have legal documents for work, and our choice is limited and here with good pay.”

Steve said that when he saw her, all his thoughts lightened up, and she was wonderful, really. And also he said that a lot of men hide other women from the woman they love, but he is different, and he doesn’t want to hide anything from me. I accepted and understood his view. We already said goodbye to each other, and he had collected his briefcase and was going to go by train to Long Island. We embraced and kissed. I did not follow him and look after him. I turned back on him and began to look at the fountain as the water fell. It was very sad. I thought that I knew his whole life and was saying goodbye for an eternity. Suddenly, I heard his footsteps. He came back. He changed his mind. He will go later; it was too sad to leave me. He suggested to go to a Russian restaurant that was nearby called Samovar. It was not too late, and there were not much visitors. The restaurant seemed huge for me. We sat at a table. The waiter brought the menu. I looked at the prices, and they were not cheap at all. I had no idea about Steve’s financial condition, and because he was not a businessman but a musician, I doubted his solvency. I had \$100. I told him about it. He smiled. “Don’t worry,” and began to order.

In the distance, there was a white grand piano. A pianist came and played. He played wonderfully. When we left the restaurant, Steve gave him \$10. We went again to walk on Broadway. There were shows with different sexual times. Cravings from one of the

little windows, an African woman showed a full chest. We took turns kissing her like people kissed a cross in the church. It was late evening.

We went to dinner again at some expensive American restaurant. By night, we were so drunk. I just wandered. We hardly got home, which was two steps away, and taking a taxi was not advisable in the New York traffic, which can stand for hours. Steven eventually went to Long Island two days later.

This meeting completely pulled out of routine my life before. I became absolutely different. I was looking in the mirror and did not recognize myself. Who is this extraordinarily beautiful, shining, happy woman? I asked myself. Would I see him again? I have his phone number, but I don't want to call first. My massage business continued, a man of about forty years, an art professional, came to have a massage in my place. He invited me to take a walk in Central

Park. Then we went to the Metropolitan Museum, where the richest collection of paintings in America is. He asked whom I worked for in Russia. I modestly replied: "I was an artist."

He said that he immediately noticed that I'm unusual and that even it is clear that I can communicate with people from a past life. I did not quite understand what he meant, but it flattered me. I went out with him from the Metropolitan Museum. I was really very fond of painting and everything beautiful, but that day, I felt so happy that everything seemed beautiful and not only recognized masterpieces.

Happiness is a brilliant artist.

I was just thinking about Steven every moment.

It was at five or six in the evening, Monday or Tuesday. I came from another client, turned on the answering machine, and heard his excited voice. He called me several times. He really wanted to see me as soon as possible. The landlord told me that he called him also looking for me. He told Ivan that we are very close and he really needs to see me. I dialed a number and called. We agreed to meet at one of the nearest bars.

At this time, the customer called. The sound of his voice was normal. But when I arrived, it turned out that he is a student who earns as a watchman in a commercial place. The official environment was strained. I felt scared. I wanted to quit and run to meet Steven. We were in the back of a huge room, and if there's something wrong, I cannot jump out. I was angry. I did not even take the money forwarded as usual. Finally, everything was all right. But I was unhappy with myself. Although nothing terrible happened, the guy paid off and called the taxi held before the exit. I was annoyed that when I felt like a queen after meeting with Steve, I had to climb on some production premises.

The bar was in the back of a huge restaurant. I came in and immediately saw his back from a far. Suddenly, maybe he felt that I was there, he turned around and looked at me with adore and it was all way, how I walked between tables, and I looked to his eyes at a distance too and all air between us was shining love's energy. I sat down near him. He took my head turned

to him and looked in my eyes very carefully. I know maybe he understood the stressful situation I came from recently; he noticed in my face, and he looked at me inquiringly. I looked to him too.

“And what?” I said, answering his questioning look.

“Nothing happened. Nothing bad,” I said.

He continued to look at me. His eyes were like oxygen that make my stress go away, filling me with power, will, and confidence. I became myself, really me, and I saw how he was happy to see me. It was so clear that he loves me. I saw this. I understood that how I, for a few days, thought about him every minute, he thought about me too. One wish was between us – to see each other soon, how it is possible. I felt like happiness spread out everywhere from him, and this strong energy reached me, and after, between us, the field of happiness became stronger and bigger. We became the center of the bar. All heads turned and looked at us. I knew the picture was wonderful; not any movie can see what was between us in that moment. We went to other bar and then other, because very fast we became the centre of all attention, but we wanted solitude, and other way we wanted be between people, because we celebrated holiday in our sole. We listened to music. We talked. In short, we enjoyed each other. We went back to his apartment very later.

In the morning, he went to his job; I went too. All that time, I felt so happy.

I felt like meeting Steve approved all my casualties – that

I left my country and my relatives. I felt like I found my fate and happiness possibly. All my relatives are alive and happy. My daughter is not with strangers, but with my parents, who are loving her unconditionally. Huge positive energy was in me and now I don't want to go back to Russia and I'm just thinking how to take my daughter here. I felt so powerful, that I can decide on any problem. I don't want to talk with Steve about his divorce. But when he started to talk about it and that his wife wants to take his house and money, I said, "Leave everything to her." I thought that we are so rich – big love between us; it is more than multimillion dollars. I don't change for any money and because love is God and I was full of this divine energy, everything is possible. We can decide on any problem, raise any business and get everything that we want and our happiness is so huge that we can make a lot of people happy. For a few times, we went to dinner and after we are listening to music, but Steve himself was like living music, and one time, when we were in the bar sitting close, he sang for me song. It was tender, like clouds enfolded me. I felt unearthly bliss, like an angel in the sky, and in the end, he said, "I will love you forever."

But his divorce dragged on. I don't want to get involved in it. Even I think maybe he or she changed opinion, because they have two beautiful little daughters. I know I saw Steven very general and he just wants to leave for yourself a little bit to go through this stress. I want do everything fast and so that everybody will be satisfied. It was hard to see that he thinks about it a lot. It

was damaging him, destroying his whole. But I cannot push him his privacy, and his will was very important for me. I tried to be patient, but I saw he needed space and we started to meet just sometimes. I missed him a lot. Very often I called just to hear his voice message. One day, Steve called me more early than usual. I came. He looked like he did not go to his job that day. He sat on the couch. I sat near him on the chair. We looked to each other. I know I can sit hours like this and look to him, like yogis do to meditate. We admired each other.

“You know,” he said after short time of silence, “I’m thinking, why did you come in my life?”

“But I love you,” I said perplexedly to answer his question. But you know I cannot give you anything. I jumped all my life like salmon swept out two children, and now I feel absolutely empty. And now my wife, whom I married and didn’t have one cent in her pocket, now she wants to take the house and leave me here.” He looked around his small apartment. I listened to him. I didn’t know what to say. “You know, let me give you \$10,000, and maybe you can go back to Russia. You know, maybe tomorrow, I will be on the streets homeless and unemployed asking help. Everything is going this way.”

“Oh, no, no, I don’t want to leave you. I love you. I cannot live without you,” – I said.

He stood up, came to me, took my head in his hand, looked in my eyes with attention as trying to read my thoughts, and kissed me.

I don't know how it happened that I went near OTV and what pushed me. But I came in and bought a ticket for the lowest price, like \$2 something, I just want to check my luck, my intuition, and I won. I got \$10, and I bought a new ticket with this money, and again I won. I got \$50 and bought again. Now I got \$250, and bought again, and I have more than a thousand. And all week, while Steve was in Long Island, I went and played and always won. It was the bar close, and I went and sat in the bar between. I was thinking, why work if I can win every day?

I stopped doing massage because, one time, the man was a musician and he knew Steve.

Steve came. He wanted me to go with him to visit his mother. She lived in the other state. We must travel by car. But I was so successful in my game with horses, and he didn't divorce his wife yet. This indefinite condition makes me very unstable. I think he should go to his mother alone. He loves me; I love him. Nothing will happen if we do not see each other for one week, and I will start deciding on my problem.

Plus, I found an easy way to make money. I like not just the gambling but also watching horses running and the atmosphere of competition and excitement. Between races, sometimes I sit in a neighborhood bar, where I met a nice man. He was American, but his background was from Scotland. I read before that Scotsmen are nobility itself. He was so good looking his face and manners make me so happy, and I don't know, maybe because I was really happy at that time, in love with Steve like

engaged, and I was sure about my present and happy future, or it was the quality of my new acquaintance. I felt so free with him like never in my life before and after. I never not miss him or remind him thinking or looking for new meeting, but I so like him when I saw him once and again, and I saw that he likes me very much too. We sat near, and, suddenly, we started covering our faces with kisses and always did it when we see each other. But we did not have any plans for each other.

I was waiting for Steve. I thought about him every day. I miss him, and soon he will be back. But maybe the happy time with Scotsman unfocused me, and, recently, I met my longtime acquaintance Andy. I used to rent a room in his mother's house, and we continued to see each other. He was planning to move to Hollywood and become an actor, and he a lot working over yourself, and he was very scrupulous about ethical standards, and because American life was new for me like for newborn, he was for me some authority on how to build behavior in a new reality. I told Andy about my new enthusiasm playing on horses. "It is not good to be a gambler. It is a shame," Andy said. His words confused me.

That day, Steve must be back. I decided to play for the last time and because in my head was that what I do not right I cannot concentrate well, and like result, I cannot win. Steve was back, but I was in OTV. I found a better place where the bar, restaurant, and gambling place were all together. He left a message that he is in New York already. I went to him. We met in a hall of his

building. He was dressed in short pants and T-shirt. He looked so simple, too simple like a country man, but I was dressed up. First, we were happy to see each other, but some hell was between us already, and we quarreled. But it was not enough for me. I went to the bar that Steve goes to often because it the closest to his home. And I stayed with this Scotsman. When Steve came, he saw me. I was in a black lacy dress, very expensive and elegant. My friend Lena, who sold clothes, said that it was \$300. And I was so happy with good-looking Scotsman, who was so attentive, and we, like before, kissed each other. Steve was trying to cover it, but he was shocked. He sat on the bar and ordered his drink, I felt how he watched me. And I thought it will be scandal now, but I was not against it. I was in desperation that I was losing him, and it is like rock and I cannot do anything with this. Like hell came inside me and rolled all my behavior and I cannot stop. Suddenly, Steve went to the machine where the music was playing and put on the song "Life Is Very Short," and he left the bar.

I woke up in the morning. It was sad recognize, that I lost Steve and I tied to live in the room of Ivan's dirty apartment. I started looking for a new one, my own. I want something in Manhattan close to Steve, but I cannot find anything. It was summer, and I didn't have a legal document. After a long search, in the end, I found a small studio in Williamsburg. It was one stop by train to Manhattan, just cross the bridge. It was on the second floor. The super suggested to make gates, but I didn't want. Already

I rented the new apartment, and I packed my things. I ordered the car for the evening, when there is less traffic, to go to the new place. The next day, I went and bought a bed and closet and organized my new place. But all my thoughts were about Steve: how to get back to him. I found in the newspaper that one woman knows how to help return people whom you love and lost. I went to where she lived in midtown Manhattan. She said that he will go back to me and gave advice to read one book, which was in short chapters, about love. There was advice to never look for love; it must come to you. I decided to learn this book. I translated all chapters to Russian.

I decided to take a new job, like a travel agent, but it was a big company of network marketing. There I met with new people. Everybody has American legal documents and regular job, but they want more extra money. I was thinking how to fix my problem to get documents.

Soon I met with Steve again. I still love him, and he loves me too, but his divorce became long term, and I for almost three years didn't see my daughter, and I think I have to do something to get my green card. In my new company, I met with one Russian man. He was younger than me, but he has a good-paying job in the airport and American passport. He likes me very much and was ready to marry me. But I so want to be the wife of Steve; I don't want to marry anybody but him.

One day, one of my new acquaintances was a Russian Jewish couple, and Sara told me that she wants to introduce me to one

man. He was looking for a helper in the office, and he can give me a green card because he is in immigration.

His name was Vinito Laigoritto. We met in the house of his Italian friend, who was married with a Russian woman.

He liked me, and I started to work in his office, but after the job, he drove his car to my apartment, and we had dinner in an expensive Italian restaurant. One evening, he told me, "If you will be with me, your daughter will be in America in one month." I didn't think too much. I believed him, and we went to the hotel.

He liked me very much, and there were a lot of promises to marry, to buy a building for me, to make me Meer of New York and a lot of compliments how special I am, the most sensitive in the world, and beautiful and smart.

I was listening to this Italian's noodles, but inside myself, I was thinking that my daughter will soon be here and I will get my legal documents without marriage, and at the same time, Steve will be getting a divorce and I will marry him.

His wife became jealous, and we started meeting for dinner or lunch. Weekends I saw with him all Broadway shows. He carried out all my wishes. He was sixty-three, and he looked not older, but not young, and he was blond with blue eyes and looks like Jean Gabin. I was just forty, but I looked twenty-nine, and I felt very shameful to stay with a man so old in beautiful public places, and very often, I took with us one familiar woman the same age like he was, and it looked like I was having dinner with my parents. But then I understood that nobody cares how old your

partner is, and especially if he likes to go to the most expensive restaurants, stores, and places, and he likes to spend money and all around respect this.

1996

“Swear to thy blind soul that I was thy Will.” / W.Shakespeare/
Meeting in 1996 I was with Vinito in Atlantic City. I tried to play roulette, but I didn't win. I lost a few thousands, but my Italian friend never worried about money. And I saw that the more I took money from him. Better for our relationship, and it really gave him motivation to work. He liked to enjoy life. We had a good dinner with champagne. He liked everything the best and expensive. He liked to spend money. As much as possible, he tried to make me feel the most comfortable every minute with him, and I was very dear for him. He said that I was the best woman whom he saw in his life, but he saw a lot because he made movies in Italy and he knew the world's best actresses. He said that I was the most sensitive and giving. I know it is true, and I was pleased, that he was able to understand my higher quality, and it made me happy in some way. Of course, I didn't have any passion for him, but if he married me, how he plans probably I will be someway happy that he really loves me and understands my higher value. We went back to New York in his car. One hand, he held rule; other, my hand. It really was a moment when I didn't think about Steve much but was in the present with Vinito.

Maybe because I was a little drunk, he left me a few thousands

cash for my expense. I very fast started to spend a lot of time with him. He took me good shopping in the best store and the best different food and wine. But it was not fine for me sitting at home and eating. I preferred restaurant. I want to be around people. I dressed good. I felt confident. Everybody was nice to me. It somehow eased my loneliness. I wrote a lot of poems in that time; it was everything for Steve, about him and inspired by him. Urin, a Russian old poet who likes my poetic talent, was very glad that I continued writing, and he liked my progress. He gave me advice to read more modern poets, but others were not interesting for me. Steve was everything to me, and I all was in him. I did not recognize what was going on around. But I very often came to Nobel store on Sixth Avenue and Twenty-Second Street. I stayed there in the cafe on the balcony and read a lot of different books and magazines in English with a dictionary. When I find something smart, interesting, beautiful, and wise, it was the spirit of Steve.

On January 28, 1996, I came back from Florida, where I was for few days with Vinito. I was so missing Steve and wrote the poem:

So much pain, so much pain!

My king has gone away,

The throne became empty

And the grief climbed it,

Between two kingdom, Alone- I drink my freedom.

It was about Steve and inspired by him. I wrote it in the

morning, when we just came back from our trip to Florida, in Miami. Two days with Vinito in the same room, even in different beds, was too much for me. And I desperately miss Steven. Only he can make me cleaner and whole again, like a skillful tuner fixes a piano. He was the king of my heart and makes it go the right way. And at the same time, I heard from the news that Brodsky, a famous Russian poet who lived for a long time in the USA in New York, has died. I was not interested in him and his poetry at that time. He was famous and got a Nobel Prize, but he was not popular. Such a strange coincidence, the same day and time, just in Moscow, died Semen Lungin, the Russian producer of the movie "Welcome or Outsiders No Entry".

All strange coincidences I found later when I experienced a long shock that happened to me. I thought they did radiology on them the same time and they both were famous jew.

To keep my independence from Vinito, I still continued working twice a week to do housekeeping for two American women, Miss Milton, who was a retired teacher, and her friend John Feelay, who was retired also before she had her own small company to retype manuscript. I came to them one or two times a week, but they were nice with me and paid \$10 an hour and sometimes more. I continued to read a lot and write poems. Steven is continuing the process of divorce, and I saw him just occasionally. The more I discovered him, the more I understood how an extraordinary beautiful person he is. I tried not to lose

time, but became more stable and independent and got my place in society. Very often, I went to Nobel store on Sixth Avenue and TwentySecond Street. There are a lot of books and magazines, after having empty bookstores in Soviet Union, the possibility to take any book that you love made me very happy. I felt like I found buried treasure. I like sitting in the cafe on the second-floor balcony drinking coffee and reading. Sometimes I met with somebody, but compared to Steve, he was not so interesting and attractive. But one time, I met with an interesting man. He was very alive. I remember he was without teeth, but it did not deface him. He said that he was an artist, and soon he will open his own gallery. He had very limited money, but full of optimism and confidence in his soon-to-be success. He said that he was a genius and he didn't have to work, and he really lifted me up, like always meeting with notordinary people. He took me to a very cheap cafe, but everything was so good in taste, cleaner, and pleasant like in a nice home. We decided to continue our meeting.

But the next day, again strange coincidence in that time I was attacked on the street. Of course, I was not careful. It was after party with my friend Lena. She left me, and I walked alone. They almost killed me. The black man almost strangled me and put a wire around my neck. I even felt posthumous bliss. I felt like really my soul was in the sky, on many, many stars, and then I felt like light reflected from them and returned to my body.

When I woke up, blood was running from my eyes. The next day, my entire face was blue and pink and swollen. I felt very

scared to stay alone in my apartment. A long time ago, I applied in a marriage agency to meet people, and, suddenly, one Russian man called me. After that terrible night, what happened to me, I was glad to listen to a human friendly voice in my own language. I shortly said what happened to me, and very soon, he was in my apartment. He looked at my face and said, "It is what America make with people." He invited me to his apartment to stay with him for while. I didn't think too long; I went with him. I was afraid to be alone, and with damage on my face, I cannot go to any public place.

Soon, I was back at Ivan's apartment, and we stayed with one Polish girl in the same room. I felt scared even to be alone in the room. When I told my story, Ivan said, "If you went through that and stayed alive, nothing will happen with you." In the morning, I fortunately met with Steve on the street. He was so happy to see me, but how I was happy and his eyes was so big and blue the same color like sky in that day. We stayed for a minute in silence, looked at

each other's eyes, and then he said,

"Life is going on."

And I wrote this poem after this meeting:

The life is going on

The life is going on waiting for visas. I go on the cornice

And soon maybe up, maybe down, But I love my town.

And then:

YOU ARE THE SKY

You are the sky

And I'm just ocean waters, How can I caress you?

And all my longing to unite with you?

The only help is a dim horizon line,

Which suddenly will cross you and me

You'll ask me: "Yes."

I'll answer: "Da."

Forever or always,

My soul has found yours for all eternity.

I am reminded how he sang for me in his words: "I will love you forever" – always tough on my heart.

I decided to move to Manhattan, and, soon, I found a small studio on West Forty-Fifth Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. I wanted to be closer to Steve.

It was already summer 1996. My new place was the center of Manhattan near Times Square. Vinito was in Italy, but he sent me some money. Often, my thoughts were about how to get my independence and lead my daughter to the USA. In the newspaper, I found a course for real state for Atlantic City. After I finish that, I get a certificate and start to sell new resort Time Share Flagship, and the boss told me that if I just bought for myself one time-share, they can help me to invite my father with my daughter to the USA. I quickly used this opportunity and

sent my father an invitation, but one immigration lawyer told me that in the beginning, it will be good if they would go to another country. I sent them \$800, and they bought a trip to Finland.

Everything looked fine in my life at that time. Step by step, I decided on my problems. Everywhere around, there was a friendly atmosphere. In the morning, I went to the grocery to buy my coffee and sandwich. The owner of daily was a black man from Africa, and every time we were joking and laughing and people saw our happy faces, everybody who came occasionally stayed and bought his coffee and sandwiches, and he started giving me breakfast for free.

I got new friends. I met one Russian girl. She was married to an American man. She loved him, but life in an American province was not fun for her, and she moved to New York and took a job in a Russian newspaper. Her name was Janna, and she was educated in art. She liked my poems, and she offered me to publish them in the newspaper New Word. I did not wake up famous the next morning; limited number of people were interested in poetry in the USA, and special poems were in Russian language in the Russian newspaper. But some people called me, and one woman who worked in Russia likes journalists. She liked my poems, and because she lived in Manhattan, we met. I read for her. She liked it and said that what other people wrote on four hundred pages, I wrote in a few words.

Urin said the same – that my poems are like

Japanese poetry style of tanka, in one world, all universe.

We were in the bar and took some drinks. I was in a good mood. Fortunately, I met one young man. He was from the other state, from the provinces. He was so clean and fresh and sweet. I took him like a frustrated beautiful flower who occasionally met on the way and spent the night with him. I didn't have any plans with him, but he was very pleasant. In the morning, when he left, I felt myself in good balance and unity with world and universe.

Suddenly, the telephone rang. It was my father calling from Russia. The sound of his voice was irritated. My daughter was in the hospital.

Something was wrong with her lymph nodes. My head briefly compiled gloomy thoughts. I was in horror that my daughter was seriously sick. Maybe she has cancer; maybe she was dying and I never would see her again. I called the hospital and talked with her doctor. He said nothing scary. But how do I know? In Russia, the doctors never tell the truth. They don't want to get patients and their relatives scared. The troublous sound of the voice of my father bothered me and demanded immediate action. I started thinking of what to do. A long time ago, I applied for one dating agency, and pretending being husband started to call, and I met with some of them and because Steve's divorce was delayed. I thought that maybe if I married somebody, I would get my green card and bring my daughter to the USA. I found the phone number of one of them, and I found that it was not necessary to be married. We could be just bride and groom back to the

USA. He was a Syrian Jew, and he was ready to help me and even make some business.

But Syrian Jew cheated me. I don't know how it happened. I didn't understand anything about credit cards at that time. He said if I would get a credit card soon, my money that I put would increase twice. But, really, he put almost all my money in his account. Another problem happened. I started looking for my Soviet international passport, and I couldn't find it. Later after all before his death, Urin told me that he stole my passport because he wanted to keep me in the USA and thought that if I would be famous in the USA, then he will be famous enough too because he told on Russian American TV that he is my teacher. Often, he told me, "You are very talented, and if you will be famous, I will be famous too." And he didn't want me to go back to Russia.

I went to the Russian consulate to make my papers to go back to Russia. It was a lot of effort to do this. But when it was ready, I found that I didn't have money – that this Syrian Jew really stole my money. We were together in the bank, he gave me a copy of the application, but at the last moment, he put my money in his account. I went to a lawyer's office close by. It was Jewish people. They said that they cannot help me because he was not afraid, they didn't know all my story, and my situation just entertained them. I went to a police officer, who listened to me with attention, but it was not a crime and he could not arrest him and push him to give my money back. "You need a lawyer." He gave an advice to me.

I started looking for lawyers in Russian newspapers. I made a few calls and I found one that was ready to help me with my problem. But he wanted that I come to Brooklyn to his apartment. This offer did not make me enthusiastic. I had experience of how to be one on one in an apartment with a Russian man. They are not gentlemen, maybe one in a million. They don't know the word "no"; always they are "ready" but your wish is not counted.

There was really a storm in my brain; my thoughts ran one by one. I could not concentrate and make a decision, and in the end, I decided to go to Brooklyn to see the lawyer. Later, I saw here very often the situation when people need a psychotherapist, people go to a lawyer, and conversely

It was the beginning of September, a sunny beautiful day. It was around four when I was near the subway going to take the train to Brooklyn. Suddenly, some incomprehensible wave caught me and suffered to the Irish bar on Seventh Avenue and Fifty-Third Street. There I met with Steve, where he went very often. In that moment, I wanted to see him so much.

And where does this power come from, this strong energy that pushed me to do not what I needed but what I wanted? But what was it that I wanted? I wanted to see Steve. I need his love right now, and, after all, things are going the right way and I can decide on all my problems.

I didn't come; I flew in the bar like Margarita, just without

the broom. It was Tuesday, not so late, just afternoon, and there were just a few people. Along the rack and across there were three men and one fat girl sitting, a little far from the men; she was sitting alone. I sat near her. I looked around; Steve was not there. Maybe he will come later, I thought. I didn't want to meet new people. I decided to relax and take time to think about my situation. The fat girl near me went downstairs, probably to toilet. Near her drink, there was big red apple and money. I ordered my drink. The bartender was a young boy from England and, like always, very friendly. We said a few words to each other. The fat American girl was back on her place and suddenly started crying. I was confused; I didn't know what to do. I knew I had to ask her what happened and maybe console her. But I was not in that mood; I was looking for comfort for myself. I started looking around, and my eyes met with eyes of the man that was sitting a little far from us, along the rack. When I was coming in the bar, I noted his big head and confidence. Now he looked to me questioningly and, as he understood my condition, nodded to me, "Welcome." I took my drink and sat nearby. He looked in my eyes, he has large face, massive chin, whiskers, high forehead, thick eyelashes that covered his very alive piercing eyes looking on me without covering interest. He was dressed in a green jacket that fit closely to his powerful body, dark blue shirt, and pink tie with white stripes that reminded me of the American flag. Some animal force emanated from him, and at the same time, there was something bureaucratic.

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