



Chapter 8. Part One. Inside.

It's strange. I haven't smoked hash for four days and I don't feel like it at all. I only have one desire – to get out of here as soon as possible. I am ready to do anything. I need to promise the cops that I will give them all the drug dealers, if they'll just let me go. And once I am free, good luck on trying to catch me. I'll cross the border with Nepal, and flee to Russia from there. To hell with this country. Of course, I won't really give them anybody. Although, the bitch that I owe for my current place of residence surely deserves the same kind of punishment. If only I could get out of here. I'll never use anything again. The damn drugs have led me here to this prison cell. I don't want to spend the rest of my life in this place. The whole pink, illusory world in my head is starting to fall apart. What have I been doing here for the last five years? Who am I? A psychedelic revolutionary trying to change the world for the better, or a coward who fled from the hardship and complications that he didn't want to deal with in Russia? Why am I here, in jail? Do I actually deserve this? Or is this some ridiculous mistake? The door opens loudly.

“Get ready, we're going to court,” a skinny cop, looking like an Indian monkey, says to me.

“That won't take long, I have nothing to get ready. Let's go.”

The building I'm escorted to looks like a poor copy of an English court. Of the primness and grandeur that the Indians inherited from the Portuguese, only badly repaired shabby furniture and worn out tiles on the floor remain. The judge, wearing a classic English gown, looks more like a parody of a judge and does not inspire any trust. The chairs squeak and the fans rotate noisily.

“Drugs were found in your possession. Would you like to say anything?” the judge turns to me, observing me critically.

“What drugs? Show me my drugs? I did not have any drugs!”

The judge, an aged Indian wearing glasses, starts to laugh out loud, pointing his finger at me. The policemen join him.

“What kind of circus is this? Give me a lawyer and an interpreter! I don't understand a damn word you're saying,” I begin to shout angrily in Russian.

Chapter 8. Part Two. Outside.

“Excuse me, do you speak Russian?” I ask a young couple making out at the hotel entrance.

“No, we don't speak Russian” a guy with a long black hair replies in broken Russian. “When I was in the military, there were a lot of Jews from the former USSR, so I can curse well in Russian,” he says, trying to stroke his girlfriend's ass inconspicuously.

“There's no need to curse. My name is Vasya. I came from Russia yesterday and my English is very bad. I can't even buy food. I've just bought some hash and I don't feel like smoking it alone. Would you like to join me?”

“Why not? We like to smoke. We're staying in Room seven.”

“And I'm in Room nine. We're almost neighbors, come to my room.”

After his pretty girlfriend nods in approval, the young man gestures for me to enter the hotel.

“My name is Yair, and my girlfriend’s name is Edi. We’ve just bought a good chillum and we want to try it. Do you smoke chillum?” he asks, taking a clay pipe out of a nice leather case.

“I’ve been smoking for a long time, but I’ve never used this kind of pipe.”

“This is the traditional way of smoking here in India. If you’ve never done it, watch carefully and repeat after us,” Yair nips off a small pea-size piece of hash and begins to crumble it into a small bowl made of polished coconut.

Then he takes out a cigarette and dries it thoroughly with a lighter, blackening the paper. After that he breaks the cigarette open with one elegant move and empties it into the bowl with the hash.

“Mix it well, while we’re preparing the chillum,” with a quick, elegant movement he tears two thin strips of cloth from the kerchief he is wearing around his neck. Edi takes one piece and wraps it tightly around a thin bamboo stick.

“This is called a ‘stick’, you wrap a ‘safi’ around it, so that you can clean the chillum after you smoke it,” Yair takes the second piece of cloth and wraps it around the narrow end of the clay pipe. He puts a clay hexagonal stone into the wide end of the chillum and stuffs it with the mixture I have prepared.

“Here, now the chillum is ready for smoking. You usually start by reciting mantras and then smoke in high spirits. They smoked this way a thousand years ago, they still smoke this way today; so let us not depart from tradition. You take one deep puff and hand it to whoever is on your right-hand side, round the Shiva circle,” I start to ask why it is passed to the person on your right-hand side and not the other way round, but Yair interrupts me, continuing his interesting lecture.

“The most important thing is to not touch the chillum with your lips. If you ignore that rule, nobody will ever smoke with you. The piece of cloth at the end of the chillum serves as a filter. You put your hand around it and it becomes an extension of the chillum, then you inhale, only touching your hand with your lips. You can suck your fist all you want.”

Showing me by example, Yair first puts the chillum up to his forehead, closing his eyes for a second, and then to his lips. Edi starts to recite a mantra, loudly and melodically, enchanting me with unknown, melodic sounds: “Bom Bolenath, Sabke Sath, Bom Shiva, Bom Shankara, Bom!” Firing the chillum up, Yair rapidly takes several shallow puffs, transforming the tobacco and hash into a small red ball of fire sticking out of the clay pipe. Yair goes first, then his girlfriend, then me. “These people in India are pretty hardcore,” I think, trying not to faint. I feel as if the smoke is penetrating my brain directly, in a cool concentrated state. Mesmerized by this magic effect, I sit motionless for several minutes, watching them clean the chillum thoroughly.

“Not bad at all, to inhale a dried cigarette and one third of a gram of hash in three puffs.”

After cleaning it, Yair proudly hands the still warm chillum to me.

“Here, look: an Italian master’s work.”

I hold the clay pipe up to the sunlight and see that the space inside is as even and polished as the barrel of a gun.

“It is made for one cigarette, exactly three puffs. We bought it today for two hundred dollars, a good chillum can’t be cheaper than a hundred,” Yair proclaims, proudly taking back the clay pipe. “There are lots of three-dollar chillums everywhere around here; don’t be in a hurry to buy them, that crap is for the tourists. Once you have traveled across India for a while, you’ll be able to tell the difference.”

“So, you are traveling, are you?” I ask them, surprised, watching the Israeli carefully putting the chillum back into the case.

“What else is there to do in India? We worked as waiters in Israel for a year and now we plan to travel around India. We’re headed down South now. We lived in the Himalayas for three months before. If only you knew, the kind of charas there... All of the Himalayas are covered with cannabis, all the locals deal in charas. That’s all the local economy is based on.

“What is charas?” I ask, expecting it to be something made from cannabis.

“We’ve just smoked hashish, it is made in Kashmir. Kashmiris climb the mountains, rub the hemp flowers with their hands, then collect everything that has stuck to their hands and wrap it in palm leaves; that’s why it is hard and you can discern traces of palm leaves on it. Charas is a freshly picked kind of hashish. They don’t dry it, it is as soft as cream, it smells like Himalayan grass, and it gets you higher than any hashish. So why did you come to India. Aren’t you traveling?” Yair asks me suddenly, checking out my trendy pants.

“As a matter of fact, I’m on a business trip. I’m looking for hemp, have you heard of such a material. It is made from marijuana.”

“Of course we have. They sell hemp clothes in Israel, too. It’s very fashionable now and relatively expensive.”

“I own a store in Russia called Hemp. I’ve come to India to buy something new for my store.

“You want to go to Nepal to look for hemp. It’s all exported from there. Nepal is a beautiful place.”

“I’ve already realized that I’ll have to go to Nepal; next time I will get there, for sure. I have pretty much bought everything I need. I’m thinking about going to Goa for a couple of weeks and then back to Russia. By that time the package with hemp will have reached Russia, and I’ll have to sell it.”

“Actually, we’re also headed to Goa. We wanted to stop by in Pushkar in Rajasthan for a week on the way. You can come with us, if you want.”