



ЦЕЛЫЙ ДЕНЬ ЖИЗНИ - ЭТО НЕ БЕСЦЕННЫЙ ПОДАРОК СУДЬБЫ

IMPROV escape effort

ВАСЯ Я НЕ ПОНЯЛ, ГДЕ СЛОНЫ, ГДЕ ОВЕЗЬЯНЫ?

LOS URBANOS

GA 03

Повезло тебе, Валера... Там, где появляется Надин, пространство вокруг начинает лететь, как в СКАЗКЕ...

Miki fee

Chapter 18. Part One. Inside.

“Today, another foreigner is checking into our ‘five-star hotel’,” Dominic tells me, tossing aside the newspaper. “Some Scottish guy was seized with three kilograms of charas.”

“Nothing interesting. I’m neither hot nor cold about it. Today I broke a record: I can already do twenty push-ups. Now that’s good news.”

“Well done, Russian. You learn English all day long, do sports. How do you have so much vitality? I can either sleep all day or watch TV. I don’t want to do anything.”

“I can’t understand how you Indians can sleep all day and all night. You slumber all of your life away. After all, if fate has thrown us into such a situation, we need to make the most out of it. Life is short. Every hour spent asleep is one less hour of your life. I’ve always wanted to have ripped biceps and to be fluent in English. And here I’ve got a great opportunity to realize my dreams. I can’t fall asleep if I know that I haven’t done anything useful during the day. A whole day of life is a priceless gift. I can’t waste it; otherwise it seems to me that life is passing me by.”

“I learned English at school, and I’m quite satisfied with my muscles,” Dominic answers, examining his biceps.

“I learned English at school, university, courses – all to no avail. Without practice, I forget everything in two weeks. But here in prison, I have learned more words than during the rest of my life. Check what new words I know now,” I point at the wall opposite me.

The wall within a radius of two meters from my ‘bed’ is covered with new English words.

“Improve, escape, effort, freedom, remain,” Dominic reads aloud, smiling. “The entire prison lexicon. As for me, I have a slightly different approach to life. For me, sleep is also a continuation of life. And sometimes this life in sleep is much more interesting than reality. In a dream, I can enjoy all my feelings the same as in reality. And what feelings can I experience in prison? Mostly it is only suffering. Suffering because everything that gave me pleasure has been taken away. Even if I don’t dream, I enjoy the fact that I can sleep now as much as I wish. What destiny has in store for me in the future, I don’t know. Maybe all I’ll dream about then will be to get a good night’s sleep. Maybe I will lack the time to sleep, so it’s better that I sleep now, for the future. And I also love to fall asleep, having smoked charas. Have you ever smoked charas?”

“I don’t even know what to answer. I can write a thesis about charas. Outside, a few years ago, I smoked a lot, ten grams per day. Last year, a couple of grams a day. And now, in prison, I haven’t smoked anything at all for more than a month.”

“Look what our David gave me,” Dominic says, showing me a small black pea on his palm.

“What a surprise! Ah, David is a good doctor.”

“Well, then, it’s time to celebrate. I’ve done enough gymnastics for today. And as for my English classes; I’ll take a break. We’ll try to remind ourselves what it’s like.”

Breaking the little pea in half and lifted it to my nose, I slowly breathe in the magical scent. It is impossible to confuse it with anything else. Memories of the Himalayas, covered with endless fields of the miracle herb from which aromatic charas is made, instantly come to mind. Oh, why did this herb bring me here?

Having made a cone from a piece of notebook paper, on the model of the Russian ‘goat leg’¹, I stuff it with a mixture of small pieces of charas and chewing tobacco, which is similar to shag in strength. The first pull burns my throat so badly I can hardly restrain myself from coughing.

“You have strong tobacco in India.”

“Strong life, strong tobacco,” Dominic answers.

The pleasant, familiar lightness strikes me first in the head, and then gradually spreads throughout my body. Leaning back against the cell wall, I become immersed in myself, watching how the reality surrounding me slowly begins to transform. The peeled walls become a nice yellow color. My brain, used to raging against the injustice of the world, slowly calms down.

“A small freedom,” Dominic says sadly, also leaning back on the floor. “India’s Independence Day is soon; maybe we’ll be lucky and come under the amnesty. My lawyer prepared a statement for the judge. Maybe I’ll be released on bail.”

“It is unlikely. There is little chance,” former policeman Chetsi interrupts our fantasies. “Those who are here for up to three years might get an amnesty, but we have no chance, we are serious criminals. We have a better chance of getting ten years than getting out of here.”

“Police, stop whining. Don’t listen to him, Vasya, everything will be fine.”

“Don’t give up hope!” our friendly killer Disay shouts to me from another corner of the cell.

Chapter 18. Part Two. Outside.

“Hello India, Hello Goa. I’ve missed you.”

Once again, I’m running barefoot on endless Arambol beach. The blue sky is reflected on the sand, smooth and wet from the low tide. Once again, I’m running across the sky. My eyes are wet from happiness, and I can’t understand whether I am crying or laughing. Happy like a child, I run trailing a large yellow scarf, which billows behind me like a flag in the currents of the warm Goan wind. I greet all the people passing me and they smile back at me with understanding. I’m back in paradise. Today, my friends from Rashka have arrived. The first of those who heard enough of my stories and, finally, decided to take a trip to India. I walk along the beach to the next village, to a cafe called Russian Sunset. I must help my country folks to see the Goa that I love.

“Hey, Valera, hello country folks!” I wave my scarf at a crowd of pale guys finishing up their duty-free alcohol in the shade of some low palm trees.

“Hey, homie,” my tipsy fellow citizens extend their hands to me one by one.

“Welcome to the Promised Land. How was your trip?”

“We don’t remember anything; we were boozing all the way. Now we’ll have a hair of the dog and maybe then we’ll remember something.”

“Vasya, I don’t understand: where are the elephants, where are the monkeys?” Valera asks, laughing and handing me a bottle of rum. “Will you drink with us?”

1 *Goat leg* – in contrast to the classical joint, which is glued lengthwise, a Russian ‘goat leg’ joint looks like an elongated paper cone, into which tobacco is poured.

“No, thanks guys, but I don’t want to drink in the heat, in the afternoon. However, smoking with you is a different story. I’ll be happy to keep you company,” pulling a tola² of charas out of my pocket, I give it to the guys.

“That’s more like it. That’s not a bad piece; that would go for around two hundred dollars at Russian rates.”

“Yeah, and ten years in prison,” one of the guys adds, laughing.

“Where will we go to smoke? Or can we do it right here?”

“Relax, guys, this is India; everyone smokes here. So smoke wherever you want. No one will say anything to you. And if the police bother you, give them ten dollars. This violation of the law doesn’t cost more than that.

“To listen to you, this really is paradise. When will you show us Goa? Because in Russia, thanks to you, all everyone in the city talks about is India.”

“You’d better change your clothes first, and get a bit of a tan. I am ashamed to appear with you like that in cool places.”

“What’s there to be ashamed of? We have normal, branded clothes. And we also have no problems with dough.”

“Come on, don’t be offended. You’ll understand everything in a week’s time. Now all you talk about is money, whores and business. And here, the values are a little different. To make interesting friends, you need to become interesting yourself first. You will soon understand everything. The closing party of the Baba Yaga Russian restaurant will take place in a week, so I’ll be able to introduce you to the world then. For now: relax, sunbathe, there’s no need to hurry.”

“Listen, Vasya. We brought a ‘micro oligarch’ with us,” Valera whispers in my ear, pointing at a guy with short hair standing nearby. “Show us the Goa you have been going on about the whole time, and we’ll finance everything.”

“Valera, why do you measure everything with money? The issue isn’t about money, but your desire to see the best here. If you want to see, you’ll see. And if you don’t, I can’t help you in any way. You’ll only pay attention to shit.”

“We will try to learn not to look at shit during the next week, but you should also not let us down, show us the party.”

The week passed by quickly, like one long moment. Every day I bought samples of hemp products from Nepalese traders at the market, learned English, sunbathed, smoked, and enjoyed my life.

“We are going to Baba Yaga tonight, are you ready to see the real Goa?” I ask my Russian friends, who have managed to get suntans and undergo a transformation.

“What, do you think it’s time to introduce us to the world?” Valera says, laughing and showing off his tan. “We followed your advice and changed all our clothes. By the way, this is Oleg. He has been asking when we are going to see Goa the entire week. He’s a micro oligarch. He is sponsoring all of today’s goodies. He also likes smoking.”

“Unless he is on a drinking binge,” a man with a pleasant Russian face adds, extending his hand for me to shake.

“Well, if you’re ready, let’s get on our bikes and ride to Chapora.”

Passing Mandrem, Ashvem, Morjim and Siolim, we drive on six motorcycles to the dusty and dirty, but fun and happy, town of Chapora.

“Here it is, the center of freaky Goa,” getting off my bike, I tell the guys, who look around in surprise.

Hundreds of freaks and hippies from all over North Goa come to this small street every evening. There are no clubs, supermarkets, or beach, but for some reason they all gather right here. Both sides of the narrow street, which is covered with a layer of red dust, are lined with tatty little bars and restaurants. There is no luxury or glamour; it is not in demand here. Trance music sounds from almost every cafe. Charas is being crumbled at every table and chillums are cleaned continuously. Most of the regulars drink fruit juice, coffee or tea. Chillums pass from hand to hand and mantras praising Shiva are heard all around. A few of the best Russian representatives of Goan freak society stand near the entrance to Baba Yaga, dancing and talking.

“Are they really Russians?” Oleg points at them in surprise. “It’s hard to believe. Where do they all hide in Russia?”

Unlike my friends, the guys standing near the entrance do not show any interest in the group of tourists that has appeared dressed in Goan outfits. Some of the freaks have long hair, some have dreadlocks. Some of them have fashionable Goan mohawk hairstyles. Their necks, wrists and ears are covered with the most incredible jewelry you can imagine.

“They don’t live in Russia,” I say, pushing through the crowd at the entrance. “Many of them migrated to Asia long ago, forgetting Russia like a bad dream.”

“Well, I love Russia,” Oleg says, sitting down at a table where the celebration of the closing of the season is in full swing. “I love winter, the Russian banya and Russian chicks.”

We are sitting on the small flat roof of the first Russian restaurant in Goa.

“That’s the owner over there, his name is Lyokha Zheltok,” I point at a guy proudly sitting at the head of a large table.

“Look at that chick,” Valera suddenly points at a Goan beauty who has appeared out of nowhere.

“Oh, that’s Nadine. Do you want me to introduce you?” I suggest, smiling and waving to Nadine.

“Of course I do,” Valera answers as if spellbound, not taking his eyes from her and downing his glass of rum. “Vasya, I think I’ve fallen in love. Maybe this is the last love of my life.”

“Hi, Nadine!” I shout to her. “Come join us, I want you to meet my country folks. Let’s drink to a successful end of the season!”

“To it not being the last one!” Lyokha Zheltok says loudly, wiping the remnants of cocaine powder from the tip of his nose.

“Where is Valera? I haven’t seen him for a week. What have you done with our friend? Have you bewitched him?”

“I’m here!” I hear Valera’s voice, as he sticks one arm out from a large pink hammock hanging on the porch outside the house.

“Valera, is that you? What happened to you? I don’t recognize you. It’s obvious that you fell into the hands of a Goan sorceress.”

“We’re on our honeymoon,” Nadine says loudly, laughing and jumping into the hammock to join Valera.

“I’m happy for you. I have an interesting proposal.”

“Don’t tell me that you’ve brought more MDMA. We feel good now even without it,” my friend says, disentangling himself from the beautiful girl’s embrace.

Climbing out of the hammock, Valera smiles and extends his hand in greeting. At last, I can completely see the transformation that has occurred to my friend during the last week.

“You look like a Buddhist monk who took too much LSD,” I say, looking at him from all sides.

Instead of his stupid hairstyle with a parting, Valera only has hair at the back, in the form of a small tuft, like Hare Krishna devotees have.

“You didn’t want to put on a lungi for anything; where is your expensive Armani T-shirt now? I see you’ve already managed to get your T-shirt painted. I recognize the style of the artist, Vlad Lenka. Only his friends, real freaks, wear his trademark ‘Los Uebanos’³ T-shirts. People wait for weeks, or even months, for him to get inspiration so they can get a T-shirt covered with one of his paintings. I don’t think this would have been possible without Nadine’s magic. You’re lucky, Valera. Wherever Nadine appears, the space around begins to change, like in a fairytale.

“Yes, that’s me, a sorceress,” Nadine laughs loudly, stretching her long, slender legs out of the hammock into the sky.

“Nadine, what do you think about going on a honeymoon to Nepal?” I say, looking at a beautiful composition of flowers floating in a large transparent bowl.

“I came here for adventure, so I’m ready to leave tomorrow,” Valera answers, trying to free himself from Nadine’s legs, with which she is trying to pull him back into the hammock.

“If Valera is going, then I’m in too!” the Goan sorceress laughs loudly again, pulling down the bright orange scarf wrapped around Valera’s waist with her foot.

“We should hurry up, my visa expires in a couple of weeks.”

“It’s April, the end of the season; everyone’s visa is expiring now. Almost everyone has already left. It’s only us whose honeymoon is just beginning.”

“And where is Oleg? I haven’t seen him. Will he come with us?” I ask Valera, taking a large ripe mango from the table.

“No, Oleg won’t come. He couldn’t adapt here. On the fifth day, he couldn’t stand it any longer, so he bought himself a ticket and flew back to his beloved Russia. He says Goa is not his place. He wants five-star hotels, whores and casinos. He is used to showing his status through money. Do you remember how he introduced himself to people at the Baba Yaga closing party? ‘Hello, my name is Oleg, I have my own car showroom.’”

“Yes, unfortunately, there are people who are of no interest to others without money. Who cares here how much he earns? No one. So he felt that he wasn’t interesting to anyone. It’s Rashka where he is a king and a god. Everyone loves him and fawns over him. Russia is his place; the majority of the people there are like him.”

The psychedelics that he took on the night of the Baba Yaga closing party scared Oleg. At that time, none of us had any idea that on his return to Russia he would decide to sell his car showroom and head off on a long trip to India. The psychedelic transformation caught up with him in Russia, forcing him to change his life.

3 *Los Uebanos* – a Goan slang term for junkies.