

Maei tee



## ***Chapter 19. Part One. Inside.***

“Welcome to our prison. My name is Vasiliy, I’m from Russia.”

“James,” the new lodger of our ‘Holiday Inc.’ hotel, as Viktor loves to call it, extends his hand to me. The short, round, hairy Scotsman looks terribly similar to the Russian Winnie the Pooh cartoon character. James tries to say something, but it is almost impossible to understand his Scottish accent. It seems like he is talking with his mouth full. Realizing that no one understands him, he smiles and goes off for a walk alone. Just like me, for the first week he walks around the outside of the prison yard at great speed, resembling a bear who has been caught in the wild and put into a zoo.

“Dobroe utro,<sup>1</sup>” Viktor yells across the prison.

“Dobautro,” awakening prisoners answer him from different parts of the prison.

“Dobrautro,” sleepy guards in turn repeat the to them funny-sounding Russian phrase .

“Hello, Doctor,” I greet David, who is as usual stretching in the morning sun.

“Hello, Don Alexandro,” I say, extending my hand to the smuggler from Sicily.

“Hi, Vashya,” the Japanese ‘Samurai’ Yuki, who we nicknamed Suzuki, greets me.

These, and a few of my cellmates, are the only ‘alive’ people among the sixty inmates in our jail with whom I can somehow communicate.

“What’s new, David?”

“I’m still alive,” the old Iranian answers me, smiling and putting a pinch of chewing tobacco behind his lip. “I have already been here for a year and a half, so why am I so haunted by bad luck?”

“What’s the matter, David? It’s such a wonderful day, and you’re in a bad mood.”

“Vasya, you know that if the drug expert analysis doesn’t come in a year, then the case is automatically closed?”

“Well, yes, that’s not news,” I agree, nodding my head.

“So, I paid a lot of money for this analysis not to come in time. I waited for a whole year and what did those jackals do? Two days before the end of the year period, the Goan police themselves went to the other end of India, Hyderabad, and collected my expert analysis. And the damn doctor that conducted the examination, besides taking my money, made a mistake in the analysis. He wrote that I had not five, but fifty kilograms of charas. That motherfucker put a comma in the wrong place. Now I will probably have to wait for another year. Why like this?”

“Because like that.” I say, smiling and giving him a friendly pat on the shoulder. “Maybe you have such karma.”

“David, and what did your expert analysis show?”

“Who needs my cocaine? It’s only eighty grams after all. It’s not a commercial amount if it’s less than a hundred grams. You can be released on bail with such an amount. The analysis showed a positive reaction. It was good cocaine, only the judge shows no interest in it. I can only be locked up for the charas.”

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1 *Dobroe utro* – ‘Good morning’ in Russian

“India is a strange country. You can be released on bail for two hundred and forty nine grams of heroin or ninety-nine grams of cocaine, and for ten grams of MDMA you can be imprisoned for twenty years.”

After his traditional Sun Salutation<sup>2</sup>, Viktor comes over and joins our discussion.

“Vasya, just think: two hundred and fifty grams of heroin or a hundred grams of cocaine can kill several people that are unnecessary for human society, clearing some space in overcrowded India. The population is almost a billion and a half anyway. Whereas ten grams of MDMA can make a few people happy, who could then give up their jobs, having finally understood that life is not for that. Who needs happy people in society? Society needs hardworking, frightened, dependent people who are ready to work for the rest of their lives for food and primitive pleasures. And what good is there in your psychedelics? When a ‘social human’ changes his consciousness, he starts to realize that making money is not the most important thing in life. That is why the laws are like that.”

“Psychedelics promote personal growth, but prevent social growth,” I agree, sighing. “But society also needs to evolve. Someday, we must develop into a fair, ideal society.”

“Vasya, it’s only you who thinks like that. Your idea is utopian; we will never achieve such a society. Remember the history of mankind. There have always been slaves and slave owners. Many centuries have passed, and has anything changed? Nothing has changed. Only the names of the regimes have changed. Socialism, capitalism, fascism, communism, democracy, liberalism – these are just names that conceal the essence of society. Any society, no matter how it’s referred to, has always consisted of two classes. Slaves who need to give their lives for the benefit of the slave owners and slave owners who create laws and regulations so that the slaves work and don’t flee. There used to be regular slavery, and now there is credit slavery. The names are different, but the essence is the same. They have just made the slaves’ leashes a little longer, and have begun feeding them better. You want to make everyone happy, and that’s why you’re sitting here. You are a runaway slave, or rather all of us here are runaway slaves, who were caught and put into rehabilitation. So sit here and get rehabilitated, you fucking revolutionary,” smiling, Viktor finishes his emotional monologue.

## ***Chapter 19. Part Two. Outside.***

We are crouching in the vestibule of an overcrowded Bombay-Gorakhpur train. I have only ever seen so many people in one train car in movies about the Nazis sending Jews to the concentration camps.

“What are we going to do?” Nadine asks us, putting on a discontented face. “It will take two days to reach the border and there are neither beds, nor seats. It’s the end of the season, Monsoon is coming and everyone is running away from the rain. In India, ordinary people buy train tickets two months in advance.”

“Well, Nadine, we only paid ten dollars for our three tickets,” Valera says smiling, in an attempt to defuse the situation.

“So we have to crouch for two days; I need somewhere to lie down,” Nadine huffs, intermittently tugging down her short skirt.

Besides us, a dozen people are sitting, standing or hanging from the bars in the vestibule of the train car. And, although the three of us are occupying

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2 *Sun Salutations* – Surya Namaskara, a common sequence of asanas, typically used as part of morning practice, although not only.

a space where five Indians could sit, we are the only ones who look dissatisfied with our places. The rest of our fellow travellers stare with a melancholy gaze at the three strange white monkeys, speaking in an incomprehensible foreign language. More precisely, almost all of them are looking at Nadine. The bare shoulders and long, slim legs of the former fashion model draw the Indians' eyes like a magnet.

“Why are you dressed in a mini skirt? Haven't you seen how the local women dress?”

“They are going to devour me with their eyes. I can't stand it any longer.” Our sorceress complains, snuggling closer to Valera. “Even in the sea, they bathe in clothes.”

“Maybe they are seeing a white woman for the first time in their life,” Valera says, trying to calm her down, and spreads a map of India on his lap.

I search for the nearest location where we can change transport.

“Ok, I think I've found the nearest town. Nasik, its population is one million people,” I point a finger at a little dot on the map. “In a million-inhabitant city, there must be a more comfortable vehicle than the vestibule of a train car. We'll make a transfer and tomorrow we will be at the border.”

Getting off at a reasonably large station two hours later, we begin to understand that the town of Nasik, tiny compared to the twenty-million-inhabitant city of Mumbai, has probably never seen white people before. Having visited the bus and train ticket offices, we realize that there are no tickets anywhere for the next two months. Stopping in the square in front of the station for five minutes to look at the map, we notice that a crowd has gathered around us.

“Valera, Nadine, take your attention away from the map for a moment, and look at what is going on around us.” I feel like we are the main characters in some crazy movie. Noticing us, passing Indians stop and freeze, forgetting where they were going. It is like someone has pressed their 'pause' button. Some of them stand with open mouths, not believing the miracle that has appeared in their town.

“Are we really so interesting to them that they forget where they are going, and are ready to stand here and stare at us?”

“Don't flatter yourself, Vasya, they are staring at Nadine.” Valera says, putting the map back into his bag. “It sort of feels like they thought that white people are only in the movies.”

“Guys, they are not only staring at me. Have you seen yourselves in the mirror? In your bright skirts with weird hairstyles, you are like aliens to them.”

Circling, the natives scrutinize us in silence, as if hypnotized. The shout of a policeman brandishing a short bamboo stick begins to disperse the crowd and shake them out of their stupor. After going around all of the taxi drivers in the station square, we understand that no one here speaks English.

“Valera, maybe you can do it. Go and talk to the drivers of motorcycles and rickshaws. Maybe you will manage to explain to them in simple terms that we have to get somewhere out of the city, preferably north,” Nadine says, wrapping a scarf around her long legs.

“I'll give it a try; just make sure that our beauty doesn't get stolen,” Valera says, smiling and heading towards the station square.

Left on our own together, Nadine and I sit on the steps, watching the passing locals. If it were not for the women's saris and dark skin, you could think that we were in Russia in the first half of the twentieth century.

“Well, here we are in the country of monkeys,” Nadine says with a sigh, nodding her head towards the policeman standing not far from us and occasionally shaking the gawping passers-by out of their trance with a loud shout.

“Isn’t our homeland a country of monkeys? Imagine some Indians dressed like we are, somewhere in Syzran or Kemerovo<sup>3</sup>, on a square in front of a station. It is unlikely that they would meet even one English-speaking taxi driver. I think the situation would be the same. Here, at least the police protect us voluntarily. In Rashka, the poor Indians would be immediately cheated out of their money by train station crooks, cops and taxi drivers.”

“I found one!” Valera screams joyfully from a distance, leading a short Indian. “He knows a few English words and I think he understands what we need. He has his own rickshaw and he promises to take us to some agency, where we can rent a car with a driver to reach the border.

“I know who have jeep,” the driver mutters happily, piling our stuff into the old rickshaw.

Having driven for nearly an hour, we finally find ourselves in the only agency in the town, according to the driver, with a free car for hire.

“A hundred dollars,” the owner of the office happily tells us with shining eyes, in anticipation of making a big profit. “We have a great jeep, one day and you will be at the border.”

“You see, Nadine, there was no reason to be worried,” Valera reassures her, moving our stuff towards the entrance.

After that, we only managed to leave Nasik two days later. For two days, we sat on chairs in the agency’s small office, waiting for the driver to return from a wedding, and then – for him to bury his uncle, then – to repair some kind of a breakdown, then – something else. In the evening, we went back to the hotel to get some sleep and in the morning the same thing happened again. During our time in Nasik, we firmly grasped what the Indian ‘fifteen minutes’ means. India is a country without time, so there was no point getting indignant. In the end we were given a small Volkswagen Beetle, seemingly dating from the time of Indira Gandhi. We only reached the border three days later. It was good that we had charas with us: we smoked it everywhere and all the time. It was simply impossible to take in the reality around us in a sober state. The world that we saw from the window of our car was so unusual and strange that we could only begin to come to terms with it while stoned. Wherever we stopped, we became the center of attention for all the people within the zone of visibility. We were like aliens, whom everyone wanted to touch. They tried to speak to us in a strange language, to sell us something, and we just smiled in response. Of course, the charas helped with that. The border with Nepal opened up to us in all its Oriental beauty. It consisted of a standard small Indian street full of shit, garbage, and rats scurrying around.

The living stream of people was divided into two parts: a narrow current of individual tourists who stopped at the border guard post, which we joined; and a huge, colorful, streaming Indian-Nepalese mass of people that did not require documents to cross the border. The fact that we had crossed the border was clear from the dramatic reduction in the amount of garbage lying around. Having driven across the whole of the country, we realized that garbage is an integral part of India. In India, one can rarely find a habitable square meter of land on which there is no garbage or other results of human life. I have a feeling that Indians simply do not notice garbage. In contrast to normal Europeans, Indians don’t hesitate to throw garbage on the floor. The Nepalese side of the border greeted us with a huge poster, on which two cupped palms and the inscription ‘Namaste’ were painted. As we understood later, in Nepal everything begins with ‘Namaste.’

Wherever we went, any conversation began with palms pressed together at the chest, a welcoming smile and ‘Namaste.’ The fourteen hours of serpentine roads in an overcrowded old bus, together with chickens, goats and Nepalese people, was made bearable by the beautiful views of the Himalayas through the window. The highest peaks were somewhere far away. They appeared occasionally when we drove along large valleys, overlooking small green gorges. The base of the mountains could not be seen, but their tops, like magic white castles, hung above the clouds, causing us to experience child-like delight. The Nepalese with whom we had to share the bus’s small seats were not impressed by the view out of the window, and, unlike the curious

Indians, they hardly paid attention to us at all, preferring to nap for the entire journey. Exhausted and with swollen legs from sitting so long, we finally arrived in the capital of Nepal – Kathmandu.

“Well, we can finally devote ourselves to our honeymoon,” settling down on the large hotel bed, Nadine forces a smile. “That’s it. For the next few weeks: no travelling. I’m tired.”

“I’ll go and buy some charas somewhere, and you can search for your hemp as long as you wish,” says Valera, lighting our last joint.

Having showered and dressed in a clean lungi, I go outside to see the capital of Nepal in the evening. Leaving our hotel and walking a few meters, I realize that I have finally made it to the right place. Practically across the street I see a sign saying Hemp above the entrance to a store. How long have I been looking for this hemp paradise!!! I need to make sure I don’t spend all my money at once. I want to buy almost everything. No; no shopping today. Today I’ll just familiarize myself with what’s on offer. Thamel, the tourist district of Kathmandu, looks like a fairytale town full of kind little inhabitants.

It feels like two ancient civilizations – Indian and Chinese – mixed in this place, creating a wonderful symbiosis. Chinese pagoda architecture and bas-reliefs of Indian gods, Buddhist and Hindu temples standing next to each other, and the mongoloid facial features of half of the population. All this makes the city unique, unlike any other.

The intersecting streets surrounding our hotel contain thousands of shops, restaurants, travel and cargo agencies. After a few streets, I understand that Kathmandu can rightly be called the capital of hemp. In almost every shop you can buy something made of hemp. In Nepal, they make everything out of it: clothes, shoes, fabric, thread, souvenirs, jewelry and, of course, hashish and charas, which are unfortunately illegal now. During an hour’s walk sightseeing, the street dealers approach me a dozen times, offering marijuana and poland<sup>4</sup>. I pass through the small streets, curiously examining a variety of unusual devices for smoking, eco-style accessories, and all sorts of other things somehow connected with hemp. I’m glad that I have finally found what I need.

But the most pleasant thing is that all it costs next to nothing. “Our Hemp won’t die; Nepalese hemp is going to help,” I think happily, heading towards our hotel. Back at the hotel, I am amazed to see a huge chunk of charas on the coffee table.

“Valera, have you gone nuts? Why did you buy half a kilo? We won’t smoke that much...”

“Why won’t we smoke it? We’ll manage it easily. I actually only wanted to buy ten grams,” Valera begins to make excuses. “But somehow I ended up buying this,” he says with a smile, tossing the hefty chunk up and down in his hands. “I asked the price from a street vendor, and he muttered something in his own language, only one thing was obvious – he wants two hundred bucks. I figured that in Rashka ten grams cost a hundred bucks; it is clear that it’s expensive for Nepal, but I wasn’t going to haggle, I was tired after the journey. I gave him the money, and he took this brick from his pocket, gave it to me, and quickly disappeared.”

“Good charas, by the way,” Nadine chuckles cheerfully, kneading a big piece in her palms. “We’ll sculpt figures out of it like out of clay.”

Coming closer, I can see already completed sculptures of a smiling Cheshire Cat, a little girl, probably Alice, and a large mushroom with a fat caterpillar on the cap, which is also smiling. It’s hard to believe it’s all made out of charas.

“Join us, and try some Nepalese charas,” Nadine says, smiling and breaking off a small piece from the cap of the sculpted mushroom. “The main thing is to determine which side to break it off of. If you take it from one side – you will grow big and get to heaven; and from the other – you will become small and sink right to the bottom.”

4 *Poland* – Nepali soft hashish.