



Mapusa Beach  
resort...



42 months  
81 days

GAGI  
KULI

А мне, Вася, нравится Россия.  
душу бы давай продай за  
полчася  
иностранку жоск.



Ой, Василь... времяеко это  
сладкое, хочется поспать и  
уверенности...  
Хочется в рай, что забыта это не  
забытится...

Maai Ja

## *Chapter 24. Part One. Inside.*

Putting aside the ‘Tibetan Book of the Dead’, I observe the behavior of a new tenant who has just arrived. Skinny, hollow cheeks, greasy dirty clothes, and obviously not being very picky when it comes to choosing a place, he positions himself near the toilet. Dominic’s bowl is on a tank with water near the toilet and he pushes it away from the new tenant in disgust.

“Go and wash up, why are you sitting here? You can smell you down the hallway.”

Frightened, the new tenant grabs a piece of soap that was given to him and, looking nervously at everyone, goes to the toilet.

“We better not contract tuberculosis or anything else from him,” moving his mug closer to his corner, former policeman Chetsi says.

“Hey, Gandhi, you haven’t got tuberculosis?”

“No, I’m healthy. I just have not eaten or washed for a long time,” I hear the new tenant’s voice from behind the door, speaking in fairly good English for an Indian.

“Dominic, do you know him?”

“Who doesn’t know Gandhi? He must have been in all of India’s jails. He spends all of his life in jails; he has neither relatives, nor a house. Now he’ll get washed up, put on some weight, treat his sores – and in a half-year he will be released, as the rainy season ends. All his life, from May to November, he eats his full in jail.”

“And what is he in here for?”

“As usual, petty theft. He stole a cell phone and got six months in jail.”

Coming out of the toilet, Gandhi anxiously looks around, stares at me curiously and sits in his corner.

“Oh, you beast!” I hear Dominic yelling from the toilet.

Jumping out of the toilet with a broom in his hand, he thumps the new tenant on the head with the handle.

“I’m going to teach you how normal people live in the same cell!” Dominic shouts, striking the Indian’s body and face. “You have only just come and you’ve already began to make a mess; weren’t you taught to flush the toilet?!”

“I got it, don’t punch me anymore, I won’t do it again,” huddling in the corner, the terrified Gandhi screams.

“Walking talk, talking walk, walking talk,” a guard sings, mimicking a cell phone advertisement, and opens the door for us.

Finally, it’s the time when I can speak Russian. Leaving Gandhi to wash the toilet, we slowly come out of the cell.

“Hey, Viktor!”

“Welcome to Mapusa Beach!” smiling, Viktor shouts back to me, as usual pulling a bucket of water out into the courtyard.

“Say, Vitya, I was embarrassed to ask before, why are your legs scarred?”

“That is a souvenir from the army. When I served in Afghanistan, I was blown up by a mine; instead of bones I have iron rods in my legs.”

“If you survived Afghanistan, then you will also survive jail.”

“Why would I need to survive here; it is like a health spa.”

“Vitya, if it wasn’t for your Russian face, you’d look like a veteran of the Vietnam War. Our Afghans don’t have long hair, but you look like a character from a film about Vietnam veterans. The bandana on the forehead, the weathered and slightly wrinkled face, tanned skin. The last thing you need is an American flag in your hand, and a smile on your face. Then no one would guess that you’re Russian. You also look like Homer Simpson in his youth. Have you watched the cartoon ‘The Simpsons’?”

“No, I haven’t watched TV for a long time. The last thing I watched was ‘Only Old Men Go to Battle’<sup>1</sup>.”

“Yes, you certainly are one of a kind. This is the first time I have met someone who hasn’t heard of the Simpsons. One of the main characters, Homer, is shown in one of the episodes as a young man at Woodstock. Well, you would look just like him if you didn’t shave.”

Pouring a couple of buckets of water over his head, Viktor rolls up his shorts, turning them into a G-string, and lies down on a towel on the ground in the middle of the courtyard.

“Today, I am going to sunbathe. If you close your eyes and look at the Sun, you can vividly imagine yourself on the beach.”

The Indians walking around leer at Vitya’s bare ass and whisper among themselves.

“I think you are turning them on, Vitya. They’ve never seen a bare white ass before. And, in my opinion, they don’t care what sex that white ass is.”

“I don’t care, I’m not in a Russian jail. No one will do anything to me here. And anyway, I am a crazy foreigner. If only they tried to do something to me...”

I squat nearby, in the shade of a wall covered with moss, and close my eyes.

“The buffet comes tomorrow, what have you ordered, Vitya?” I ask, imagining a bright juicy mango.

“This time, I wrote a huge list. My mother sent me some money, so I’ll celebrate. Oranges, mangoes, bananas, apples, grapes, cookies, candies, nuts, jam, milk, soap and toothpaste,” he lists, counting on his fingers, not opening his eyes. “We only live once. Soon I’ll get my expert analysis – why should I economize?”

“What about vegetables?”

Viktor begins to laugh hysterically, grimacing and opening one eye.

“Vasya, I’ll never understand the Indians. Can you believe it? You can order fruit, but not vegetables. Juice can be ordered; mineral water cannot. I have already written a statement to the prison warden and complained to the prison doctor that I need tomatoes, cucumbers and onions. Today, David and I are going to write a petition to the judge. Something like: ‘I’m a foreigner and I do not have enough vitamins.’ If the judge refuses to give us vegetables, I will declare a hunger strike. I will write a poster: ‘Why not tomato?’ and I will take it to court with me every time I go.”

“Tell me, Vitya, what would you like to eat most of all right now?”

“I want raw oysters with lemon juice. I think about them more often than anything else; as for other things, I pretty much have it all.”

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1 <sup>1</sup> ‘Only Old Men Go to Battle’ – an old Russian film.

“Well, I want a woman, Vitya. I would sell my soul to the devil for half an hour of a woman’s caresses.”

“No, Vasya, I would not give even a hundred rupees for a woman. I’ve had enough of women. All evil comes from them. Now, without them, I feel great. Nobody does your head in, no one bothers you; you can do whatever you want. If you think about it, we are sitting here because of them. I showed off in front of my girlfriend and ended up playing the drug dealer. I had everything: money, cars, drugs. All I wanted was to show my woman that I’m the coolest. And where did I end up? Here alone, and I don’t know where she is or with whom. If I was offered a woman or an oyster, I would choose the latter.”

“Looks like you have already got old,” I laugh, wiping my face, which is sweating from the heat.

“Why am I ‘old’? Everything is in working order. If the urge gets too strong, you can jerk off in the toilet at night. A sexual orgasm is a dubious pleasure; just a second and that’s it. And then you stand there and think, ‘Why am I doing this?’ And an oyster – it is delicious, it gives pleasure for a long time.”

“What are you chatting about, Russians?” David asks, coming up to us.

“We are chatting about the pleasures we have been deprived of – about women, about food. Viktor dreams of oysters. As for food, I miss pizza.”

“I can get you pizza,” the Iranian, sitting next to us, says with a straight face.

“Tell your wife to make a small pizza and bring it to me in the hospital. But the pizza shouldn’t be larger than a pack of cigarettes, then I can easily carry it in my shorts into the jail,” unable to keep up his serious tone, toothless David cracks up with laughter, “and as for women, everything is also very simple. You write a statement to the prison warden, that, well, you ask him to let you go home on Saturday and Sunday, and pledge to return by ten in the morning on Monday, and give your word of honor. You file a statement and wait.”

“Get lost, David!” Viktor laughs, unrolling his shorts to cover his pink buttocks, which are slightly blushing from the sun.

“Vitya, and what would you want most of all from the real world now?”

“From the real world? Most of all, I want to get out, Vasya. Do you think that is a real desire or not?”

“To be honest, Vitya, in the near future it’s impossible. Pramud has been waiting for his expert analysis for almost a year.”

“I don’t want to sit here for a year. But after serving a year, when I get out of here, I’ll demand a million dollars compensation and file a lawsuit against the police. To serve a year for a pharmaceutical anesthetic, how is that even possible? I’m a foreigner, a disabled Afghan war veteran who came here on vacation as a tourist and lost everything. My business collapsed, my wife left me. My best years passed in jail, I want at least a million.”

“Why are you fuming about it here in front of us; save it for the court. We know everything about you. Get out of here first and then you’ll see what happens. You were actually put in here as an enemy of the state.”

“Why, an enemy of the state?” Viktor asks in surprise, crawling closer to me into the shade.

“Well, let’s think logically. The government makes laws: tell me what drugs can you legally have in large quantities to avoid punishment?”

“You can have up to twenty kilos of marijuana and get out on bail; but what has that got to do with it?”

“No, Vitya, I’m talking about synthetic, highly profitable drugs. You can have one hundred grams of cocaine in your pocket, and be released on bail in a couple of weeks. Why do you think that they have such laws here in India? After all, since the times of old man Freud, everyone has known that cocaine is a dangerous drug. However, it can be possessed in a large quantity here.”

“Probably, to make it easier to sell.”

“Right you are, Vitya. In this manner the state supports the sale of cocaine. They even organized a special service called the ‘anti-drug police’, that oversees this sphere. And what did you do? You almost brought down their whole cocaine market with your fake. The rumor about your magic powder quickly spread throughout Goa. I even heard tourists praising your powder: ‘Everyone’s cocaine gets you high for thirty minutes, and Vitya’s keeps you up for four hours.’ Who would lock you up for a legal pharmaceutical drug? Only those selling real coke whose way you got in. You even hit upon the idea of giving away business cards with the inscription ‘Magic Help’ to everyone at parties, where the old drug dealers sell their cocaine under police cover. You’ll be lucky if the cops didn’t plant real coke in your powder.”

“But they wouldn’t plant a hundred grams of coke, would they? That would cost ten thousand bucks.”

“One hundred grams is very unlikely, but five grams they could. And then your case could be delayed for another year. So get out first, and then you can dream of becoming a millionaire.”

“Well, can’t I even dream?”

“It was you, Vitya, who told me – you have to dream about real things. And I’m just showing you a real possibility.”

“Well I’ve had enough of it, this reality. Vasya, let’s talk about something else. Everyday it is the same thing. All conversations are about possible realities, real and unreal desires. An ordinary man here in jail has only one desire – to get out quickly. Two years ago, there was a case where someone got his expert analysis in eight months. Someone got lucky. According to the law, if the expert analysis doesn’t come in twelve months and eight days, the inmate is released. So twelve months and eight days is our dream, we hope to get out in this time. And if the analysis comes back earlier, then it is our good luck. Whatever happens, you won’t get out earlier than your own luck. You need to dream of getting out of here during this interval: from hope to luck.”

## ***Chapter 24. Part Two. Outside.***

“Well, cyber gypsies, it’s time to see the real India,” I try to cheer up Lena and my friends, as we walk behind a huge cart stacked with luggage, on top of which my always cheery Vasilinka sits proudly.

Pausing for a moment to rest and wiping sweat from his face, the porter complains once again, asking us to give him an extra fifty rupees for the work. A passing elderly woman wrapped in a blue sari coos over Vasilinka and pinches her chubby cheek affectionately.

“Get your hands off her, you dirty cow,” unable to stand it, my wife starts yelling in Russian.

Frightened by such aggression, the Indian woman quickly moves a few steps away and, judging by her look, is perplexed.

“Lena, what’s the matter,” Ilka tries to calm her, stroking her arm.

“I am fed up with these filthy Indians. Vasilinka will soon have sores on her cheek. All the way from Goa to Bombay, every woman passing by my daughter tries to touch her cheek.

“Well, what can you do, they have a tradition of showing their love in such a way. Your daughter is pretty and they like her.”

“And don’t they have a tradition of washing their hands!?” Lena shouts, no longer restraining her emotions.

“Why do you think they don’t? Just like you, they wash their hands with soap and water,” trying to calm my Lena, I put my arm around her waist.

“Don’t try to pacify me; take your hands off me. It would be better if you bought us some plane tickets. I’ll dig my nails into the face of the next person that touches my daughter. You say they wash their hands, then why is there dirt everywhere? If they were clean themselves, they would maintain cleanliness around them. I lived with these pigs for six months in Arambol. They shit where they eat. I’m tired of India.”

“My dear, you were in Goa, and Goa is not India. The Goan Indians consider themselves more to be Portuguese. And they are all clean, compared to the rest of India. To consider Goans Indians is the same as to consider Tajiks Europeans.”

“Well, thanks for reassuring me. What else should I expect from them? This is the last time I travel in India by train. Next time buy us plane tickets, or Vasilina and I will return to Russia.”

“What’s wrong with her?” Den, trailing behind, asks me in a whisper.

“Don’t pay any attention, she will probably have her period soon, she is always furious a few days in advance.”

“Oh, I get it now, my former wife was the same. Personally, I really like trains. Their restrooms are cleaner than in Russia. And the Indians aren’t really such pigs. It’s just that there is a half billion of them. So it seems that everything is dirty.”

“Why are you telling me that, Den? You should tell it to my Lena.”

“Oh, no, you’re her husband and you must teach her; I don’t want to become the enemy of your family.”

“Lena, now we’ll get on a train, and in two days we’ll be in Nepal,” I carry on with my efforts to appease my angry wife.

“When you called me to come and live in India, you didn’t say that the rainy season here lasts for six months, and that we will need to move somewhere else for that time. You know, I’m tired from packing up all our things for monsoon. You were getting stoned with Den on the balcony, and I was packing everything into plastic bags, so that it doesn’t rot before our return. Then I packed our luggage while you were sleeping after a party. I am tired. I hope that six months in Nepal will pass without me brewing kvass, Russian tourists and Hemp.”

“Lena, look at everything from a positive perspective: the porters are carrying our things for us, and we have a personal chef, Krishna.”

“Don’t try to pacify me; this is my normal state. I’m just ready for anything,” Lena says, finally forcing a smile and taking our daughter down from the suitcases.

Upon reaching the border, we face the first unforeseen problem: it is closed. There is another crisis in Nepal related to the revolution. Having unloaded all of our bags around the border guard booth, we stand watching as on the other side of the border several hundred Nepalese strikers with banners and red flags block the roads, demanding the abdication of the king.

“Well, don’t be down. Come on, let’s stay in a hotel. There is a good one a hundred meters away,” I say, putting our things back onto the rickshaw again. “Don’t worry, Lenok, in a few days the border will be opened. We just have to wait until the strike is over. I have MDMA and charas; let’s throw a small party tonight and relax a bit.”

The owner of the hotel, an elderly Sikh<sup>2</sup> with a black turban on his head, meets us at the entrance and immediately warns us that the strike might last for a week. Movement over land is completely blocked. But there is hope that if there are about fifteen people, a small plane will fly from the border to Pokhara.

Having checked into the half-empty, but comfortable small hotel, we stand on the balcony, sipping beer and watching the Nepalese strikers waving flags with strange symbols. There is an odd sign on the red banners: a sickle, hammer and scissors.

“Why didn’t they depict a seven-pointed leaf on there as well?” Lena says hugging me, having finally relaxed after a line of MDMA. “I love you, Vasya, please don’t take my moods seriously. Look how sweet our Vasilinka is sleeping. Maybe we should also get some rest?”

Two days later, the hotel owner wakes us up in the morning and gives us the good news.

“Get dressed quickly and come downstairs. In two hours there will be a plane; the next opportunity to fly away will be in two weeks. Everyone must give seventy dollars, and your chef – thirty-five. Sorry, but those are the rules; in Nepal foreigners pay twice the price for tickets.” Having quickly packed our things and had breakfast, we jump into three rickshaws and attempt to cross the border inconspicuously.

“Vasily, I’m afraid of these idiots – I don’t want us to get showered with stones.”

“Why would they do that to us? They are protesting against the king.”

“In Russia in 1917 they were also against the king, and you know how that ended.”

“We need to drive for about forty minutes to reach a small airport. The airport is guarded by the military. Don’t worry, we will be in safety soon.”

An agitated crowd with banners and sticks appears in the main street in front of us. The enraged mob chants incessantly: “King, go out.”

Our rickshaw driver quickly realizes what is happening and turns into a small alley. We ride in silence through deserted streets to bypass the crowd. I’m trying to defuse the situation with jokes, but Lena is not smiling, and presses little Vasilinka to herself.

“Well, here we are, safe,” I say, watching the porters unload our stuff at the small airport.

We are flying with Yeti Airline.

“Do you remember the famous snowman living in the Himalayas? This airline was named in his honor. We will live in the country where the snowman lives.”

Having passed the baggage inspection point, in horror I recall that I have fifty grams of MDMA and ten grams of charas in my luggage. But I am lucky and no one notices our contraband. Next time I should be more careful, otherwise I could end up in jail through my foolishness. I have never flown on such a funny plane before.

“Dad, dad, this plane is so small, like a toy.”

“No, baby, it’s a real airplane. The country is small and so is the plane.”

“Look, Dad, that woman looks like an angel,” Vasilina points at a stewardess dressed in a white sari.

“Why like an angel?”

“Because she is wearing white and she has a kind face.”

After giving the passengers cotton balls to put in their ears, the angel-stewardess asks everyone to fasten their seat belts. The fifteen-minute trip would last fourteen hours by bus. We only need to fly over one big mountain. Taking off from the Earth, we fly over a large stunning gorge and it seems like we only just miss the tips of the treetops with our small wheels. Reaching its maximum height in order to fly over the ridge, the plane starts to descend. Ahead we can see Pokhara, conveniently located near a beautiful lake.

“Where are we? Where is your promised Nepali heaven?” dissatisfied once again, my wife grumbles, sitting next to me on a cart that is being pushed by a young Nepalese guy.

“Isn’t this paradise? No big deal that there are no cars; you know that there is a revolution going on now and there is a strike across the whole country. And why don’t you like the cart? We will be taken to our hotel for just one dollar. We would have to pay twenty for a taxi.”

“So next time you go by cart, but Vasilina and I will go by taxi. See, people are laughing at us. Maybe we are the only ones crazy enough to come here at this time.”

“No one is laughing at us, they are locals greeting us. They are very friendly here. Especially now that there are hundreds of empty hotels and restaurants. Now we are the only source of income for them. They will carry us in their arms. We will live in a palace. We’ll stay in a hotel for a while, and then I’ll find a palace for us. Would you like to live in a palace, my girl?”

“Of course I would, daddy.”

“I promise you we’ll have a palace.”

“I hope that we will live without any fucking two-week tourists unable to wipe their own asses themselves without help, ‘Lena, the hot water ran out; Lena, the electricity turned off; Lena, we have a spider in the toilet,’” mimicking the Moscow accent, my wife huffs, trying to force herself to smile at the people we pass by.

After staying for a few days in a hotel, getting a good night’s sleep and eating decent food, we gradually start to get used to our new place of residence. The sea and palm trees begin to be replaced by the mountains and the lake. Instead of a scooter, I purchase three bicycles. A black one for me, a red one for Lena, and a small pink one for Vasilinka. Every morning, I get up and walk around the town, looking at dozens of homes in order to choose the best palace for us. After a few days, I finally find the house I had been dreaming of.

“Why did you rent such a large house?” Lena complains, annoyed that I made a decision without her. “Eight rooms, three floors, who will keep this palace in order? Me again? The Goan house was enough for me; I want to have a rest.”

“Don’t worry, Lena; why are you unhappy again? We’ll hire a cleaning lady. You won’t have to deal with this problem.”

“I know your cleaners, they only see dirt if it is larger than a nut. Everything must be cleaned again after them. Who will do it? Me again? I need to

take care of Vasilinka. And in any case, you promised that I could rest here.”

“Take it easy; if I promised, I will do it. And I have already found a kindergarten for Vasilinka. Everything will be fine. I have always dreamed of living in a big house with a blooming garden, a large study, a dining room, and a huge roof where you can throw parties. Each room has its own toilet and shower, and decent, if old, furniture. And all this happiness for just one hundred and fifty dollars per month.

Climbing up onto the roof, Lena’s mood improves, and she admires the view, fascinated. The Sun is setting behind a mountain, painting the sky and the lake surface in shades of pink. We sit on the tatty mattresses scattered across the roof.

“Here it is – happiness – and you let yourself get overwhelmed by mundane problems. Isn’t the view from the roof more important than a cleaning lady?”

“Well, I agree, darling, I was a bit hasty – it’s beautiful here.”

“Have we found our happiness? We can spend our whole lives like this. How can you want to go back to Russia after this?”

“Oh, Vasiliy, it is temporary happiness; I want permanence and confidence.”

“Lena, who in this world can give permanence and confidence?”

“Half a year on the beach under the palms and six months in the mountains is probably everyone’s dream. I just want a guarantee that it will not end tomorrow. And now I don’t feel this guarantee.”

Having run around for a while, our child falls asleep right on the mattress on the roof. After darkness covers the Earth, thousands of fireflies light up everywhere, along with millions of stars. Isn’t this paradise? I hug my beloved, who stares into the distance, already calm and relaxed. Nepalese music plays in the distance. A pleasant female voice sings about Parvati, the goddess of love and fertility.