



Hari See

Chapter 27. Part One. Inside.

“Vasya, have you heard that Yelisei declared his love today?”

“What love?”

“Love of God.”

“Yes, the whole jail heard him yelling all evening.”

“The warden came twice to try to calm him down. Yesterday, I gave him a little bit of charas and he flipped,” Viktor says with a guilty smile.

“You shouldn’t have done that. You can’t give drugs to crazy people. He should be put in a psychiatric hospital, in a quiet place. He needs to be given tranquilizers in order for him to return to reality from his fantasies, and you arranged him a crisis in jail.”

“Who said that he is mad? Are you a therapist?”

“Although I am not a therapist, a dozen of my friends lost their minds in Goa. I can see that he has the symptoms written all over his face. Five minutes of conversation were enough for me to understand that he has flipped out. He took too many drugs and now he doesn’t understand anything. His logic is broken. I tried to talk to him. Such people lose their willpower, they can’t stop, they devour all types of drugs, and then they can’t understand where reality ends and fantasy begins.”

“What do you mean: broken logic?” Viktor asks, stopping in the middle of the courtyard under the drizzling rain.

“Well. Take, for example, a cockroach. Tear off its leg and let it go. It will run away. From this example, it can be assumed that if a person loses his leg, then he or she will run on one leg. It’s a classic example of broken logic.”

“What’s so illogical about that?” Viktor is surprised and tries to make a smart face. “In Afghanistan, I saw much more than that. If you want to live, then you’ll run home even on one foot.

“I see, Vitya. When you stepped on that mine in Afghanistan, it looks like you didn’t just injure your legs, but also your brain.”

“Maybe,” Viktor says, smiling, “but where is this line between madness and ordinary perception? Who sets it? Those who have weapons in their hands or those who are in power? So, to send me, a young guy, to die in a foreign country, isn’t that crazy? Or to prohibit marijuana, which causes neither withdrawal symptoms nor aggression, and to advertise booze, which makes people go crazy from their hangover, on a nation-wide level, isn’t that crazy?”

“Yes, I understand, Vitya, calm down, and I’m not angry with Yelisei, I just want to help him.”

“Don’t you think, Vasya, that you got into jail because you wanted to help everyone? Why do you try to impose your help, who asked you for it?” Viktor gets more agitated. “Have you decided to change the world for the better? Maybe you are playing Jesus?”

The Indians around us have hushed and watch curiously as two Russians argue over nothing.

“Yelisei gave me a very interesting book to read, about God, no nutcase would have understood it. After reading it, I realized last night why I got put into jail. I was supposed to meet Yelisei in order to read this book. My destiny led me to this book all my life. If anyone else had given me this book, I wouldn’t have read it. But I saw how happy he was and decided to read it. It’s called ‘The Teachings of the Fire Spirit’. Now I realize that I have lived

incorrectly my whole life. Now I know how to be happy. Do you want me to tell you?”

“No, Vitya, I do not. I think you are definitely out of your mind. Yelisei was taken to a psychiatric hospital, and you want to get in there, too.”

“I don’t deny that I’m crazy. And you’re crazy. We all are crazy.”

“That’s it, you’re pissing me off. Walk around on your own from now on. I can’t listen to you anymore. I’d rather go and talk to normal people. I’ve had enough of you, when will they finally let an idiot like you out of here?”

Chapter 27. Part Two. Outside.

“Have you heard the news? Romashka¹ and Zont² were arrested at the post office yesterday,” Lyosha tells us excitedly from the entrance.

“It can’t be true!”

“Of course it can. Yesterday, after the party, they went to the post office to send a package. They didn’t even change clothes. So they came to the main post office in trance outfits with stoned eyes. Just imagine the scene: two stoned freaks dancing without music, with a drum in one hand and a jar of ‘Chavan Prashthi’³ in the other. The main post office is always guarded by the police. So, the policeman looked at them, took a pre-prepared needle and, without thinking twice, stuck it into the jar and immediately pressed the alarm button.”

“And what, they couldn’t come to an agreement for money?”

“No, no agreement possible... They tried to escape and put up a fight. As a result, Zont’s teeth were kicked out, and Romashka’s arm was broken. Yesterday, they were broadcast on all of the Nepalese TV channels. It’s such an unpleasant story. Especially considering the fact that I have a ticket to Rashka tomorrow. I’m carrying a pound of charas in my stomach. You don’t think those guys will grass on us?” Vlad, whose nickname is ‘Lenk’, asks anxiously.

“What will they get?” I ask, thinking about the five kilograms of charas lying under my bed.

“If they go to jail together they could get four years each; if one of them takes the blame upon himself, he would be released in two years.”

“They always give more for organized crime,” Vlad says, putting aside a T-shirt on which he painted a huge smiling cat with five legs earlier this morning. “Let’s stop talking about them. If they’ve been arrested, then so be it. There is no need to breed paranoia. Tomorrow, I have to go through customs with a pound of charas and a smile on my face, so let’s close the subject. Look at the funny cat I have drawn on my T-shirt. I have an entire collection of T-shirts called ‘Five legged cats.’ In Moscow, I’ll sell T-shirts like this for two hundred bucks. I’ve got ten drawn already.”

“And what about the ‘Los Uebanos’ series?” I ask, remembering the cool T-shirt he painted for Valera.

“Los Uebanos is last season’s trend. For six months, I drew Los Uebanos T-shirts in Goa and sold the entire collection. I’ll carry charas to Moscow, come back, and have enough money for another six months. In Nepal, I will draw five legged cats. And after the cats I have an idea: to paint Buddhist demons and hungry ghosts.”

1 *Romashka* (Russian) – chamomile, here a nickname for one of the characters, Roman.

2 *Zont* (Russian) – umbrella, here a nickname for one of the characters.

3 *Chavan Prashthi* – a thick, honey-like Ayurvedic medicine.

Vasilinka suddenly rushes joyfully into the room, and grabbing my and Vlad's hands, starts pulling us, trying to make us get up from the couch.

"Let's go to the balcony, the monkeys came back to harvest the corn again!"

"Come on, Vlad, it really is worth a look," I say, following my daughter.

We position ourselves in chairs on the huge balcony to watch the upcoming show of the struggle for the harvest. Ten meters from our house, a band of monkeys slowly comes down the side of the mountain in the direction of the cornfields. Having divided into two groups, the monkeys surround a small cornfield located on the hill. Seeing the approaching band, Nepalese peasants begin to shout loudly, waving their bamboo sticks. Apparently being accustomed to this turn of events, some of the monkeys try to distract the peasants by attracting their attention through screaming back at them.

"Look, the most interesting part is about to begin," I point at the second group of monkeys, which begins to slowly peel the ripe ears of corn.

Having noticed that the second group of monkeys is eating the harvest, the peasants abandon the left flank and run in a crowd from one end of the field to the other. The leader of the band gives a loud cry, and a dozen monkeys quickly climb to the top of the bamboo thicket, taking an ear of corn each.

"Why are the monkeys smarter than the peasants?" Vlad comments with a smile. "For hundreds of years the farmers have lived side by side with the monkeys, but they haven't learned how to protect their crops."

Vasilinka bursts out laughing loudly and claps her hands, cheering on the team of monkeys by shouting to them, "Come on. Come on, the people are getting closer!!" Having gnawed the juicy corn, the monkeys begin to throw the empty ears on the Nepalese peasants from above.

"Look how clever the monkeys are," my daughter points at the second group, which slowly begins to strip the ears on the left of the field.

The peasants abandon the right flank and run to the other end of the field in a noisy crowd. The left group of monkeys repeats exactly the same maneuver as the right group, and having comfortably positioned themselves in the tops of the trees, slowly eats the sweet corn. This is repeated a few times. Having eaten their fill, the two groups slowly jump from tree to tree and head off into the jungle. The only thing the peasants can do is to count their losses, collecting the nibbled ears.

"Tonight's show is over. To be continued," Andrey says, laughing, and pulls a chillum out of his bag.

"What will we do today, get stoned or do nothing?" my Lena asks with a note of boredom.

"If you don't want to get high, you can clean the house," I'm starting to get annoyed by her constant discontentment.

"Don't quarrel again. Do you want me to show you the best ballet?" my little Vasilinka offers, trying to distract us from another brewing conflict.

"Of course we want to," smiling, we reply in unison.

"Then I'll change my clothes and give you a performance. Go down into the garden. And you, Daddy, turn on some slow music. Just not trance, please. I don't like trance."

"There it is: opposite thinking. The eternal problem of children and parents. I would like for her to grow up into a real psychedelic freak, and she loves ballet. There is one boy in her kindergarten, his father is a well-known Italian drug dealer, who can't stand the police and calls them all 'pigs'. So, once we were sitting in the Juice Center near the kindergarten, drinking juice, while our children ate fruit salads. And he asked his son, "Christian, tell me what do you want to become when you grow up?" "Daddy, when I grow up, I'll become a police officer, I will put criminals in jail, and everyone will be afraid

of me.” His father nearly choked on his juice.”

“Vasya, and would you like your daughter to take drugs when she grows up?” pregnant Larissa asks me, stroking her big belly.

“That’s a difficult question, Larissa. I have asked myself it many times. Of course, I don’t want her to get hooked on drugs out of despair. But I want her to make a conscious choice herself. She’s watching us now and making conclusions about what is good and what is bad. On the one hand, she sees our contented, stoned faces; on the other, she sees how we quarrel irritably in the morning until we have a smoke. It would be good if she simply didn’t want them. But, if she consumed them occasionally and consciously, I wouldn’t mind. Maybe I am living such a life so that she can see both sides of the coin. After all, drugs are not only ‘bad’; they are, primarily, medicine. And, more often than not, medicine for the soul. I will try to raise her so that her soul isn’t sick, and I hope that when she grows up she will prefer to take nothing at all. We are psychedelic warriors trying to change the world for the better, and she likes ballet. Maybe she will live in a different society. I hope that people will make a quantum leap in perception by that time. Maybe in the near future, people will move to the contours of higher perception, and then there will be no need for drugs at all. And if she wants to follow our path, I won’t mind either. And I’ll show her by my own example what kind of path it is and what the pitfalls are.”

Downstairs, we sit in a semi-circle on the steps in the courtyard of our house. Between two large bushes with red flowers, my little princess starts dancing to slow music on an improvised stage, carefully imitating something she saw once on TV, ‘The Dance of the Little Swans’. The doors of the iron gate to our yard open slowly, and I see five pairs of small black eyes curiously observing the unusual dance of the little white girl. Seeing them, Vasilinka pauses for a moment and invites them to come in with a gesture.

“Come in, sit down,” my Lena says in a friendly manner, inviting the neighborhood children to enter.

Grubby and in tattered clothes, the children sit down next to us on the steps, mistrustfully. My daughter, trying her best with a serious face, attempts to repeat the dance of the dying swan. Becoming emboldened and realizing that nobody is going to hurt them here, the neighborhood kids quickly lose interest in the show.

“Give me money,” holding out his hand, the eldest six-year old boy asks first.

Then all the children, having lost all interest in Vasilinka’s show, start begging loudly for money, turning their backs on my daughter.

“Why have you come here? To see the ballet or to beg? Look, a little girl is trying her best for you,” I point at my daughter.

“Money, Money,” the little bastards scream excitedly, holding out their hands.

“OK, enough, if you do not want to watch, go away,” I point at the gate severely.

Realizing that they won’t get anything here, the children run away noisily, leaving the little dancer perplexed. A moment later, a hail of small stones falls on us from behind the fence.

“Why didn’t they like my dance?” my little girl clings to me, crying.

“That’s how this unjust world is. Not everyone can understand beauty,” I try to calm her down.

Turning off the music, I hear that someone has pulled up to our gate by the sound of clattering gravel stones.

“What’s wrong with you, you look like a ghost?” I say to Ilka, who is wheeling a bicycle into the yard.

“I just made a trip to call to Rashka, everything is very bad. The package with charas was arrested and my grandmother was taken to the police station for interrogation.”

“Misfortune never comes alone. First our DJs, Romashka and Zont, now you. I am afraid that something bad will happen with our package,” Lyosha adds, glancing at his pregnant wife.

“And I was going to go back to Rashka,” Ilka says, rolling a joint with trembling hands. “What will I do now? I have run out of money.”

“You can’t go to Rashka for the next two or three years, and I am saying that as a lawyer,” Andrey adds and hands her his lighter, “tell us in detail what happened with your grandmother.”

“She received a notice from the post office that said, well, she can come to collect the package. She went to the post office, received everything with no problems, brought it home, and put it under the bed without opening it as I instructed her by phone. A week later, the cops came to her home with a search warrant. It turned out that they had sat in an ambush near the entrance for a week and waited for someone to come up and pick up the package. They searched everyone who went through the building entrance and looked suspicious. And, thank God, they didn’t wait for me.”

“Don’t worry, Ilka. You didn’t write your name when sending the package, did you?”

“No, it is not on there.”

“Well, then, in a couple of years your case will be sent to the archive. They have no evidence that it was sent by you. So, in time, the case will be closed. What did your grandmother tell the cops?”

“She said that the package had been sent by her granddaughter’s friend and that her granddaughter lives in India.”

“Don’t worry, Ilka, you’ll get dreadlocks braided and become a freak in India. Now you have a good reason,” Vlad says, laughing and trying to cheer her up.

“Well, what should I do, also become a freak without dough? After the arrest of the guys, I don’t want to come close to the main post office with hash.”

“Den, who is making you go to the post office? Get a bus ticket and go to India. There’s no need to go to the post office. In Delhi Main Market there are hundreds of small firms engaged in shipping goods to Russia.”

“We sent a package last year,” Lyosha interrupts, “we put a kilogram of charas right on the bottom of the bag. The Indian who accepted the package found it and gave it back to us. He only scolded us with a finger and said that it was illegal. Take a bronze statue of Shiva, they are empty inside, stuff it with charas, sprinkle the top of it with pepper and other spices so the dogs don’t smell it, and cover it all with epoxy resin. It is unlikely that someone will think to check whether there is something inside.”

“Then I’ll have to do it like that; I have no money at all. I’ll pack my stuff tomorrow. And from Delhi I’ll go to Bollywood⁴. Maybe I’ll find a job there. They say they need Russians to do voiceovers for films.”